Duke UNIVERSITY | GRADUATE LIBERAL STUDIES

Inequality, Resistance, and Reparations: A Step Towards Justice for Puerto Rico

Tatiana González Buonomo

Faculty Advisor: Jennifer C. Nash
Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies

April 2023

This project was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program in the Graduate School of Duke University.

Copyright by

Tatiana González Buonomo

2023

Abstract

This project examines how Puerto Rico's history has been shaped by colonialism, specifically through the construction of structural inequality from the 16th century until today. It analyzes how the Spanish colonization established social inequality through many mechanisms, including othering, the privileging of whiteness, the systematic erasure of Blackness, slavery, and the influence of the Church. Other historical moments to be highlighted are the notable events of rebellion performed by both the enslaved and the free population. These efforts of resistance were continued by three Puerto Rican feminists: Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luisa Capetillo, and Julia de Burgos, through their lives and literary contributions. Structural inequality became further entrenched with the United States' colonization, and I focus on the Foraker Law, the Maritime Merchant Act, the Ponce massacre, the birth control experiments, the occupation of Vieques, and the differential response to Hurricane María to show how the U.S. has benefited from and continues to harm the Puerto Rican population. In this project, I argue that there is a case to be made for reparations in which the United States acknowledges, redresses, and apologizes for the harms and atrocities committed to the Puerto Rican people. Instances in which the U.S. exploited Puerto Rico are not the exception to the rule; they reflect a pattern. I made these observations through a survey of the available scholarly literature, articles, and a literature review of the only work which posits a preliminary framework for reparations conducted by Pedro A. Malavet. My project addresses a huge gap in the literature, since the only scholarly article regarding reparations for Puerto Rico was published in 2002. Through a program for reparations, Puerto Ricans could balance structural inequalities and take a step towards justice.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to my advisor Professor Jennifer C. Nash for her indispensable guidance, support, and feedback in this project. I am grateful to Professor Anne Whisnant who was the best DGS anyone could ask for. I would also like to thank Professor Susan Thorne for inspiring me to continue working in the field of history, and Professor William "Sandy" Darity for the enlightening conversations which led me to pursue the idea of reparations for Puerto Rico.

This project could not have been possible without my parent's endless love and support. I am grateful to Miguel A. Salgado for his thought-provoking, intellectual contributions. I also thank my friends who have cheered me on throughout this process. Finally, I would like to thank my cat Cleo for her emotional support and for all the times she sat by my side as I worked tirelessly toward this goal.

Introduction

Puerto Rico deserves to take a breath of fresh air. Ever since the 16th century, the atmosphere has been dense with a fog: colonialism. Colonial powers have shaped our identity, culture, politics, education, worldview, and every aspect of our lives. It began with the Spanish colonization, continued with the American invasion, and still defines Puerto Rican lives today. There are several threads that can be traced throughout Puerto Rico's history so that we can understand the current climate. In order to better grasp the meaning of the current state of affairs and how we can take a step towards justice, we must look back at the origins of structural inequality. In my first chapter, I trace the origins of inequality since its inception throughout the period of Spanish colonization. Using decoloniality's concept of border thinking, I will be able to look at history from the sidelines and uncover moments which have been hidden by traditional ways of thinking. I analyze methods used by the Spanish for domination, such as othering, the spread of whiteness, slavery, the influence of the Church, and the systematic erasure of Blackness throughout four centuries. Furthermore, I highlight moments of resistance by the enslaved and free population.

The second chapter continues to look at rebellion, but this time through the lens of Puerto Rican feminist writers: Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luisa Capetillo, and Julia de Burgos. Through their lives and literature, they revolt against colonialism and patriarchal traditions. They contributed to the creation of a literary tradition of resistance in the island and beyond. In the third chapter, I track the effects of continued colonialism, this time at the hands of the United States. I underscore four historical events where the U.S. has benefited from or harmed the Puerto Rican people. These include the 1900 Foraker Law, the 1920 Maritime Merchant Act, the

Ponce massacre in 1937, and the birth control experiments of the mid-fifties to early-sixties. These events further entrenched Puerto Rico's lack of sovereignty and their status as second-class citizens. Finally, the fourth chapter looks at these harms and injustices perpetrated by the United States with the addition of two more: the occupation of Vieques and the differential response to natural disasters. For all of the harms and atrocities committed against Puerto Ricans, it is only fair that the United States must pay. I argue that there is a case to be made for reparations for Puerto Ricans as we look forward to a postcolonial future, in which the U.S. acknowledges, redresses, and apologizes for the harms done unto Puerto Ricans. Perhaps in this way, Puerto Rico could take a step towards justice and might someday be able to breathe freely.

Chapter 1: The First Colonization

Origins of Inequality

Decoloniality unveils the dark side of modernity by revealing how our ways of thinking/doing/feeling are built upon the spread of Europe's hegemonic power, which began during the late 15th century and still influences our worldview today. Here, I am thinking mostly with scholars including Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and María Lugones who deployed and developed this term after the Bandung Conference in 1955. While there are many ways to unravel decoloniality, I think it could be easily described as two sides of one coin. On the one hand, "heads" accounts for the political, economic, and social progress which came to life during the Eurocentrist expansion. On the other hand, "tails" represents the dark side of modernity and encapsulates the horrors unleashed by (in Puerto Rico's case) the Spanish colonization, including rape, murder, famine, deadly diseases and slavery, to name a few. As we delve deeper into Puerto Rico's situation under Spanish and U.S. colonialism, I will use concepts that are fundamental in decoloniality, such as border thinking. Using these tools, I will try to find answers to the following questions: In which ways has Puerto Rico's history been shaped by inequality? How has the erasure of the African presence on the island been systematically carried out? Have there been moments of resistance?

The first few decades of Spanish colonization set the foundation for how the Puerto Rican population would be treated. The Taíno genocide, the introduction of enslaved Africans, and the years that followed must be taken into account when we think about how inequality became structurally embedded in the fabric of Puerto Rican society. The four-hundred and five years of Spanish colonization dramatically changed the existing social, political, and economic structures, and had a long-lasting effect. I focus mostly in racial inequality, since it was so marked and it set

the foundation for issues that exist today. This approach brings to the surface how racial hierarchies and other mechanisms of subjugation were built and still persist. Looking at this specific historical period with this approach allows us to engage in epistemological reconstitution by liberating the production of knowledge. It shows precisely how the construction of binaries, whiteness, and othering were some of the main tools of domination. It also grants us the ability to dispel false notions, such as the belief that Taínos were savages without a functioning society, and that the African presence in the island was minimal and without influence in the building of a Puerto Rican identity, society, and culture. Additionally, it brings to light how difficult it was to eradicate slavery and how the tradition of resistance started in the island.

Prior to colonization, Puerto Rico was inhabited by the Native indigenous population known as Taínos. The Taínos belonged to the aboriginal Arawaks of the Greater Antilles ("Taíno"). They called the island "Borikén." It was only a few years later in the 1520s that the Spanish renamed it to Puerto Rico, which means "rich port" (Yale). The new name was based on the many resources harbored in the island, such as coffee, seafood, lands with potential to be exploited, men and women who were later enslaved, and gold.

Taínos had a social hierarchy which, organized in descending order, gives us the following structure, starting with the cacique.[1] The cacique held the most power and he was the leader of the cities which were called yucayeques. The Taínos lived in bohíos, which were small huts where families and sometimes friends lived together. The bohíque was a sort of shaman who practiced rituals using a hallucinogen from the seeds of the cohoba tree. This allowed him to connect with higher powers in nature and make important predictions that influenced the

[1] I chose not to italicize words in Spanish in order to promote an egalitarian vision of both the English and Spanish languages. In this way, Spanish words are not viewed as outside the norm, less than, or othered.

yucayeque. Next came the nitaínos, known as the warriors which would hunt for food and protect their fellow Taínos in case of a foreign threat from another group. And finally, the common people who gathered the food, made ceramic pots and plates, and took care of the children were mostly women called the Naborias (Marrero-Rosado).

An approximated number of 20,000 to 50,000 Taínos lived in Borikén (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Sometimes they would have feuds with other Indigenous peoples from the Caribbean, but no fight ever had the consequences than those brought about by the Spaniards. The Taíno genocide nearly obliterated all Taínos, resulting in "the existence of only 1,148 Taínos remaining in Puerto Rico" as reported by the 1530 census (Yale). Some of the multiple causes which led to this genocide was the handling of the Taínos as disposable lives, working them to death, and introducing deadly diseases for which they had no immunity, such as smallpox. After the genocide, the previous social structure of cacique, bohíque, nitaínos, and naborias completely collapsed. The new hierarchy placed the Spanish at the very top, and almost every Taíno was relegated to slave status. Here, using Achille Mbembé's work on necropolitics can help us understand the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Mbembé's concept of necropolitics builds on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower. For Foucault, "biopower appears to function through dividing people into those who must live and those who must die" (Mbembé 16). There is a clear split dividing the powerful "ones" from the "others," who Mbembé describes as savages, phantomlike, disposable, shadows, and beings in a state of death-in-life. Foucault's notion of racism and biopower are tightly interlaced. In his view, "…racism is above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower, 'that old sovereign right of death'" (Mbembé 17). Mbembé turns the positive term of "bio" or "life" into "nekros" or "death." Power is no longer seen in terms of the preservation of life and it becomes a

matter of death. By emphasizing the concept of death, he brings to the surface the phantomlike, the disposable, the prevalence of death over life. He shows how necropolitics upholds the deadening effects required by the dominant group to remain in power. Specifically, Mbembé shows how necropolitics becomes a weapon in the maintenance of colonialism. In his article, he uses several examples of colonialism, which show how the ability to rule over foreign peoples comes from the colonizer's sovereignty which enables them to exercise control over lives. This control allows them to perform the murderous functions of the ruling class, and it belongs to the dark side of modernity.

In relation to Puerto Rico, the colonizers wielded biopower over the "savage" indigenous population and the enslaved Africans. The Spaniards exercised their power to determine who died and who stayed alive. The issue here is not only this all-consuming power, but what Mbembé calls a triple death. According to him, in the plantation slave system, the enslaved become expulsed from humanity. "Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status" (Mbembé 21). Through this triple loss, the Taínos and Africans became completely dominated. They were stripped from their identities and their lives were forced into the abyss, becoming dead-in-life.

The Matrix of Otherness and Pedagogical Imperialism

As we move forward into the 16th century, the insertion of enslaved Africans was a pivotal moment which forever changed Puerto Rico. Since the Spanish had lost nearly all of its "workers" as a consequence of the Taíno genocide perpetrated by their own hands, they now needed to find a replacement. A process of racialization began, which created a binary opposition between the white colonizers and the "othered" colonized Black people. In order to understand more about this process, I will look into sections of Sylvia Wynter's *Unsettling the Coloniality of*

Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument and the theoretical framework she creates. Wynter says that: "…it was to be the peoples of the militarily expropriated New World territories (i.e., Indians), as well as the enslaved peoples of Black Africa (i.e., Negroes), that were made to reoccupy the matrix slot of Otherness…" (Wynter 266). The Spanish (or white people more broadly) became the yardstick with which everyone else was compared to.

As Wynter states, a matrix was created in which any skin color, hair, body shape, beliefs, politics, art, culture and ways of thinking/knowing/being that was opposed to or did not fit in the apex occupied by white people, was declared "otherness." Drawing from Anibal Quijano, she says that race is a purely invented construct that enabled the West to replace the previous understandings of what it meant to be human. As proposed by Wynter, a conception of men arose which was understood in religious terms. Prior to the 18th century, man was understood as theocentric, which allowed for the existence of a true Christian self and an untrue Christian self. In these terms, the "others" were considered heretics or enemies of Christ. After the 18th century, the new understanding of Man was secularized. Here, theocentricity goes out the window and is replaced by rationality. The true Christian self is substituted by the rational self, and the matrix of "otherness" was now occupied by irrational men. "Otherness" could also be described as a lack of the Western self.

In Puerto Rico's case, the Spanish justified their invasion under the guise of evangelism and the amelioration of the Taíno way of life. In Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings' video titled "Racism: The History of the Problem," he asserts that whiteness is driven by European Christianity and the notion that they were chosen by God. He delves deeper and says that European colonizers imagined themselves as teachers of the world, a phenomenon which he calls

pedagogical imperialism (Jennings). Not only did this mean that they "cultivated" the Indigenous peoples by forcing them into Christianity by whatever means possible, but they also cultivated their lands. They separated the people from their land which resulted in a loss of identity for the Indigenous and the emergence of private property for the Europeans. The Indigenous peoples could no longer define themselves on their own terms. Now, Europeans defined the Indigenous peoples based on themselves, and they told them how to live. Rev. Dr. Jennings adds that the unrelenting desire to tell people how to live was a characteristic of whiteness, with greed being at its core. This emergence of race and private property built binaries that did not exist before. The European Christians were the ones who taught, owned land, and held control over the others, while the Indigenous peoples became the landless, eternal students who were stripped from the deep connection to their land.

Returning to Wynter's theories, we can see this pattern being repeated in binary terms as well. According to Sylvia Wynter's understanding of man as theocentric during this time, it follows that the conquistadors were the true Christian selves, arriving peacefully to spread the word of Jesus Christ, while the Taínos and Africans were savage untrue Christians. The domination/subordination structure that these concepts create are only true if whichever category that is being "othered" is not only inferior, but also subhuman in a way that completely erases any credibility or importance to the ideas and beliefs that are different than those of the colonizer, much like the slave's triple loss explained by Achille Mbembé.

The Taínos had a complex belief system which involved many gods, different rituals, interactions with the land, and how they treated their fellow Indigenous peoples. For instance, part of their religious patterns was the strong belief of Atabey: the mother goddess and creator. She also symbolized fertility, and she is usually represented naked with her legs spread apart as

half-human and half-frog. Different offerings and practices were done to revere this goddess. Other gods include Yucajú (god of the sea), Juracán (god of hurricanes), and Guabancex (goddess of storms) (Marrero-Rosado). Their belief system was promptly demonized by the Spaniards. The Spanish colonizers stripped them of their polytheistic system and forced them to accept the one and only Christian God. Those who converted were baptized. Those who refused were killed, or they would pretend to be Christians while secretly maintaining their own religious beliefs.

The Spanish evangelism did not stop when Africans became part of their slavery system. Some of the African peoples practiced various religions from different places, such as the Dahomey, Yoruba, Wolof, Efut, Qua-ejagham, Ibibio and Igbo (Picó 145). Any kind of religion which was not Christianity was not tolerated, and the conception of a single male God prevailed. However, the conquistadors' religious violence was not always met peacefully. As stated by Fernando Picó in his book *History of Puerto Rico: A Panorama of Its People*, the first documented rebellious attempt traces back to 1511. A group of Taínos "destroyed the town founded by the nobleman Cristóbal de Sotomayor, killing between 150 and 200 Spaniards throughout the island" (Picó 150).

The revolts did not end with the Taínos. Guillermo Baralt—a scholar who studied the revolts by the enslaved in detail—identifies twenty efforts of rebellion by the enslaved people in the island. The uprisings failed mostly due to faulty organization, miscommunication, and lack of potent weapons that could counteract the Spaniard's more advanced artillery. Moving forward to the late 1700's until 1848, the conspiracies and uprisings "were concentrated on the north coast, mainly in the area between Bayamón and Vega Baja, and on the south coast, mainly around Ponce, where there were five collective manifestations against the slavery system (Baralt 137).

These areas represent the largest groupings of enslaved people throughout the island. This tradition of rebellion will be connected later to the lives and work of three Puerto Rican feminists.

The locations where Baralt highlights the biggest population of enslaved people is no coincidence. It was in the north coast and the south coast where the plantation economy, such as sugar plantations, were taking place. As the island's population grew and the economy diversified during the 18th century, new towns were founded and some began to settle in the mountainous highland. By this time, the lines which separated Taíno, African, and Spanish were blurred.

Forced Whiteness

Throughout the European colonization, Spaniards had spread their roots all over the island. A racial structure was established as a result of the interethnic "relationships" between the Spanish colonizers, the native indigenous population, and the Africans. I write the word relationships between quotation marks because if the connection was spearheaded by the Spaniards, it was almost always a forced union, as a result of harassment, violence, or rape. During the initial stage of colonization, this was the rule. The situation changed near the end of Spanish colonization, when there were more consensual relationships and Puerto Rico's racially mixed population had already evolved throughout 400 years.

A highly structured social hierarchy emerged which recognized new groups of mixed backgrounds. The fundamental category was whiteness and the amount of "white blood" each individual had. Any deviation from this category resulted in a less privileged position on the hierarchy scale. Also, these classifications "have their own set of privileges on a sliding scale

based on skin complexion, hair texture, facial features, geography, and other factors" (Picó 7). This led to the formulation of a set of labels that identified these groups on a scale of whiteness. The new imposed identities included but were not limited to: mestizos, mulatos, cuarterones, zambos, jíbaros, trigueños, jabaos, and prietos.

To clarify how skin color and physical attributes changed within the scale, I will explain a few these terms. Cuarterones—which contains the term in Spanish for "quart"—or "quadroon" in English, means that they had one quarter of Spanish blood. Jíbaros lived in the mountainous island. The closer they lived to the mountains, their skin was considered lighter and closer to white. While the jíbaros were very poor, they had more privilege than, let's say, the trigueños. The trigueños' skin was Black, but it was a "lighter" Black. Jabaos meant trigueños but with blue or green eyes. Finally, the worst in the toxic scale of whiteness was the prietos. They were the people with the least amount or no amount of "white blood" inside their bodies. To this day, this term continues to be used as an insult for Puerto Ricans with darker skin.

Going back to the relationship between race and place, town populations were clearly variable according to skin color. As I mentioned before, the borders of the island were related to Blackness, and the closer you got to the mountains the closer you were to the upper echelon of whiteness. The Puerto Ricans who moved inland were imagined as a "white peasant majority nostalgically representative of Puerto Rican national culture" in contrast to the "handful of dark coastal laborers who were in but not of the island" (Godreau 13). It is interesting to note that the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is described in a similar fashion: Puerto Rico belongs to but is not a part of the U.S. The details of this relationship will be explored in the third chapter. This dichotomy regarding the alleged distance between the white inland

community and the Black community found in the coast exacerbated the racial dynamics of exclusion which were bolstered by the overvaluing of whiteness.

There is one phrase in the previous quote which I find problematic—the "handful" of dark coastal workers. As I've explained before, the myth of racial mixture is the belief that Puerto Ricans share equal parts of Spanish, Taíno, and African in their blood. One often hears Boricuas[2] saying "we are all the same" or "we are all satos."[3] The conception of this homogeneous ethnic group hides the construction of racism and racial inequality. In her contribution to *White Latino Privilege*, Dorothy Bell Ferrer explains that: "The way in which mestizaje is recognized makes room for racism and white supremacy to flourish because it gives us a dismissive and false analysis of race that ignores how race in Puerto Rico has been historically constructed" (Haslip-Viera 101). Invoking this myth saves people from thinking about race and racism in a more nuanced way which recognizes the different layers of subordination within this Boricua "hybrid." However, as if by an act of magic, people tend to think Puerto Ricans lean more towards white, more than any other racial category. Now we know that this act of magic is actually a centuries-old effort, which has become ingrained in Puerto Rican society to whiten the population. Internalized and interpersonal racism metastasized during this time. The long history of anti-Blackness is hidden. The African presence has been minimized or ignored completely. The truth is that Puerto Ricans who are actually white remain a minority, and the idea that Africans were just a handful of coastal workers who had no influence on Puerto Rican culture is false.

[2] The term "Boricua" is used as a synonym of Puerto Ricans, and it originated from the Taínos original name for the island which was Borikén.

[3] A concept usually used to refer to dogs or cats who are not purebred and a result of mixed ancestry, "sato" invokes the same idea of a mixed race.

Afrodescendance

The introduction of enslaved Africans in 1510 marked a new era. In a detailed examination of slavery in Puerto Rico, David M. Stark writes: "By 1530, Africans constituted 2,284 (69 percent) of the island's 3,327 laborers, while Amerindians accounted for the remaining 1,043 (31 percent)" (21). Evidently, Africans accounted for the majority of the island's workers, and since there weren't many Africans who were not enslaved laborers, we can assume that this percentage perhaps also shows the total African population in the island. Moreover, this assumption is confirmed by Fernando Picó's explanation that in 1531, Africans constituted the majority of the population. Not only that, but they also greatly impacted the Boricua culture and economic processes. While this trend fluctuated toward the centuries, I hope that this analysis has shed light on the fact that Africans were not "hardly a handful" of negligible workers relegated to the coast. Picó highlights that: "Out of all the groups that arrived in Puerto Rico at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th centuries, the most numerous and significant for the economic growth of the island and for the development of Puerto Rico's national culture were the Africans" (143).

The incoming population's ethnicity was constructed on the basis of the coastal region from where they were taken. As noted by Stark: "Throughout much of the first two centuries of Puerto Rico's colonization, Greater Senegambia and West Central Africa were the principal suppliers of African slaves" (Picó 86). Baptism records in San Juan from the year 1672 to 1727 and 1735 to 1739, show that the predominating place of origin of the enslaved people from West Central Africa (which accounted for over half of the adult slaves) were Loango, Angola, and Kongo (Picó 89). An effort during the early 19th century tried to create an influx of white settlers to promote the process of whitening in the island. These foreigners were lured to Puerto Rico by

the Royal Decree of Graces in 1815. This political reform incentivized white Catholic European foreigners to settle in Puerto Rico by granting them free lands and tax exemptions for 5 years. This decree made some progress regarding the island's economy, but ultimately the influx of white settlers remained overshadowed.

Over the course of the 18th century, the African presence in the island was diversified as the slave trade introduced individuals from the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Dahomey. As the influx of enslaved Africans strengthened the workforce and the complex economic systems shifted—from gold-mining to sugar production, and from livestock ranching and animal husbandry to the cultivation of tobacco and coffee—the nature of race relations in Puerto Rico was transformed. At this point, the relationship between the myth of a hybrid population and power relations were more defined. The fact that up until recently there was hard-to-find proof of the development of Blackness in Puerto Rico and how it is barely accounted for shows the deployment of white supremacy to erase the Afro-Puerto Rican presence. Nonetheless, the Afro-Puerto Rican presence exists and persists, even if a recent 21st century event showed otherwise.

The roots of 15th century white supremacy extend all the way to the present. A poignant example lies in the answers to the 2020 census on the question of race. Puerto Ricans were asked the question of race for the first time. The results were puzzling, but in retrospect they should not have come as a surprise. A majority of 80.7% identified themselves as white only, while a minority of 7.9% identified as Black or African American alone (Christenson 13). This figure of 80.7% of white only people wildly misrepresents the actual racial and ethnic composition of Puerto Ricans. Granted, there weren't sufficient or accurate choices in the census to choose from.

There is a move in political and academic circles to account for this discrepancy. The option given by people in these circles to correct the wrongful choice of whiteness is the creation of a new category called "Afro-descendant." The term Afro-descendant highlights the fact that the majority of Puerto Ricans are descended from Africans. This is not a term like Black, which apparently seems like all of the individual's ancestors are Black, nor a term like African-American, because this option best describes the category where Black people are placed in the United States. Afro-descendant also leaves space for the inclusion of other ethnic categories. The fact that we are Afro-descendants does not nullify the option to have Taíno or White ancestry. It recognizes that this concept best encompasses the Boricua population. However, this term is not known to all Puerto Ricans, as it began in academic circles.

A major step forward stemmed from this effort in which the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus has now created a minor in "Afrodescendance and Raciality" that began in Fall 2020 and is led by award-winning author Mayra Santos-Febres. The UPRRP is considered the best university in Puerto Rico, and yet it only offered around two courses related to Afro-descendant literature. There has never been a program like this in Puerto Rico or Latin America, and it will influence "the development of Puerto Rican Studies, Latinx Studies, and Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies more broadly—particularly in centering blackness in all of these fields" (Santos-Febres).

This effort is what is known in decoloniality as epistemological reconstitution. In this process, the production of knowledge and power structures are de-linked from hegemonic Western and Eurocentric epistemologies. As stated by Walter D. Mignolo: "We delink from the humanitas, we become epistemically disobedient, and think and do decolonially, dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs" (277). As we turn away

from the centers of hegemony, we walk towards the corners and what's on the edge—that which has been hidden. Epistemic disobedience is practiced here by not following traditional white, Western, Eurocentric knowledge and by recognizing local knowledges. By having a minor program in Afro-descendance, the university is performing an epistemological reconstitution which moves against the erasure of Blackness. This changes the assumptions under which the knowledge regarding Puerto Rico's history was built. The voice of the "others" is centered, and hidden stories, histories, facts, culture, and literature come to the surface. It becomes a process of de-Westernization and the production of knowledge is freed from whiteness. If we kept the ancient epistemology of the Spaniards, we would think like Spanish chronicler Fray Íñigo Abbad y Lasierra. In his view, the Taínos were lazy and ignorant savages (Abbad y Lasierra). Since they were conceived as such, this justified the inhumane treatment they received and the obligation they had to join the Christian faith. How can we use epistemological reconstitution in the broader scope of the island of Puerto Rico? First, we need to account for a powerful, controlling force which has only been mentioned briefly…

The Power of the Church

The Church initially came to have an influence in Puerto Rico through the Spanish. Now, I will name several ways in which the Church spread its power throughout the island. First, Taínos were tortured or killed if they did not let go of their polytheistic beliefs and accept the Christian faith. Of course, the Spaniards were breaking commandment number six which is "You shall not murder." Additionally, the Africans were not exempt from this kind of treatment. Apart from baptism, Puerto Rican citizens had to marry through the Church. Since the inception of the first towns, they all eventually had a church in each town's center. The Church possessed enough authority to influence every individual and it permeated every social institution. As told by

David M. Stark, “Throughout Spanish America, the Catholic Church was entrusted with overseeing and regulating the most meaningful moments in a person’s life—birth, marriage, and death—and was responsible for maintaining a written record of these events” (96). Its presence made its way into the family systems. Not only did the Church urge people to relinquish their previous religious beliefs and accept the one true God as their savior, but also it penetrated the family unit and prescribed certain rules to follow.

According to Suárez Findlay: “The church tended to uphold their patriarchal right to control their wife's physical movement and social and economic interactions” (115). As is commonly known, women were relegated to the domestic sphere and their chances to be a contributing member of society outside of the household were almost none. The woman occupied the space of the submissive wife who cooked, took care of the children, performed household duties, and bowed down to any of her husband’s wishes. The Church itself was structured in a hierarchy where one man at the top has most of the power, men in the lower ranks followed, and women occupied the lowest ranks.

Moreover, the Church used white supremacy tenets to operate, as explained by Katie M. Grimes. In her article about the colonized Catholic Americas in relation to white supremacy, she uses the example of baptism in chattel slavery to explain that:

> Baptism served slavery in the following ways: it severed the kinship ties of the women and men it helped to enslave, it re-branded their bodies with marks of white ownership, it coerced slaves into Christian community, it served to infantilize enslaved adult women and men, it aggrandized white women and men as masters of both heaven and earth, and it helped to make and maintain race. (Grimes 24)

In this way, the Church had power over families, enslaved peoples, bodies, and race. Perhaps, this way of infecting the island reminds us of Mbembé's necropolitics, in the sense that the Church wielded power over those who they deemed deserved the condition of being dead-in-life, and those who suffered from the triple loss of a home, their bodies, and political status. The white man and woman become the pawns of the Church, possessing the sovereignty to own, control, dehumanize, and kill. Moreover, it maintained the rationalization that any sort of inequality was God-given.

Finally, the Church had a stronghold over education. In fact, the first efforts to establish educational institutions were carried out by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church was in charge of the primary education where students were to receive an instruction based on the Catholic faith. Alegría and Rivera Quiñones note that during the 18th century, "La influencia de Juan Jacobo Rousseau y de Pestalozzi fue significativa pero, a pesar de estas ideas de secularización de las escuelas, la influencia religiosa predominó en la educación primaria en la manifestación de las virtudes y en el arte de lectura y escritura." "The influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Pestalozzi was significant but, in spite of these ideas which promoted the secularization of schools, the religious influence predominated in primary education on the manifestation of virtues and the art of reading and writing" (Alegría). An education controlled by the Church clearly upholds religious beliefs and values, steering away from secularization. Like the lava spilling out of a volcano making its way into every pit, pocket, and pore, the Church slipped into every crevice of Puerto Rican society.

Resistance Through Revolts

The Catholic Church and the Crown's desires were not always welcome to the growing Criollo, African, and Afro-Puerto Rican population. Between the years 1802 to 1828, the number

of African and Creole slaves tripled (Baralt 135). As mentioned previously, Guillermo A. Baralt identified and analyzed over 20 rebellions. The most significant tactics of subversion were: the bomba dance which the enslaved used to plan conspiracies, burning the cane fields to assault those who came to assuage the fire, and finding whatever weapons they could use in the enemy's possession. The penalties for the rebels were physical torture, two-hundred lashes, starvation, imprisonment, public garroting, or death.

The last rebellion with the goal to capture the towns was carried out in Vega Baja in 1848, at the most important plantations. This attack was led by the slaves of López, Prado, Otero, Náter, y Soler and the plans were to attack the military garrison, seize the militia's weapons, and massacre the whites (Baralt 115). Unfortunately, there was an informant. Miguel "the mulatto" told his master about the conspirator's plans in the morning of the same day the revolt would take place. Since those involved in the revolt were not aware they had been betrayed, the conspiracy carried on in the night of August the 13th. However, they were immediately intercepted and arrested, and the conspiracy was crushed. Some of the punishments for those involved included the death penalty, years of imprisonment, and one owner got fined for being careless with his hacienda. How long would this horror continue?

The discontent of the Puerto Rican people with the Spanish government and their growing desire for independence was exacerbated after the ending of the Civil War in 1865 (Picó 183). The next year, Puerto Rico was plagued by a financial crisis. Taxes were increased, properties seized. The sugar and cotton industries subsequently fell. A hurricane and several earthquakes wreaked havoc on the island. These economic and natural disasters only fueled the people's long-standing resentment towards the government. The Boricuas were unable to move out of the matrix of otherness so that their voices would be heard and their humanity recognized.

They had little influence on domestic affairs, their interests were not reflected in government policies, and their recent abolitionist efforts were met with apathy if not complete hostility. Their colonial wound was wide open, and the government just kept pushing their blunt blades into the people's hearts.

With bleeding bodies, Boricuas organized themselves to catalyze the first major revolt for the island's independence on September 23, 1868 in a major center of coffee production. El Grito de Lares[4] was organized by several coffee planters, the physician Ramón Emeterio Betances, and the lawyer Segundo Ruíz Belvis. After joining forces, they organized about six hundred people carrying shotguns, revolvers, and machetes. The insurgents entered the town of Lares, which was on the midwest portion of the island. Once they were inside, they "arrested the municipal authorities and the Spanish merchants, proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico, and set up a provisional government" (Picó 118). In order to celebrate, on the following day they persuaded a priest to sing a Te Deum. This meant that the establishment of the republic was metonymically acknowledged. Unfortunately, just like with the slave revolts, it wasn't long before news of the conspiracy reached the ears of the Spanish government. Afterwards, the militia was promptly mobilized and the brave rebels were caught. Most of them were sent to prison where some perished from diseases, while others were freed. Regardless of the outcome, this conspiracy was proof that Puerto Ricans were ready for political change and independence, and it showed the extremes they were willing to take to get it.

[4] El Grito de Lares is translated as "The Lares revolt" or literally as "The Lares scream."

A Taste of Freedom

All abolitionists—slaves and scholars, physicians and peasants—hoped for slavery to end and for independence to begin. Half of those wishes were granted. On the 4th of July of 1870, the Spanish government approved a preparatory law, known as the Moret law, to abolish slavery. It represented a compromise between proslavery forces and the abolitionists. As is to be expected this law favored those with the most power, and it served as a way to postpone emancipation while offering a partial victory for abolitionists. On the one hand, Luis A. Figueroa affirms that "it restricted emancipation to slaves over sixty years of age and to children of slaves born after the law's publication…" which meant that they wouldn't have to worry about the welfare of slaves who were less productive, while keeping those who were in their "prime" (114). On the other hand, it gave abolitionists hope that at least they had begun freeing *some* of the slaves. It is unclear how many planters followed this law, and ultimately it provided just a spectre of freedom. Nonetheless, "the Moret Law 'provided a lever—a weak, fragile, awkward lever that enabled some slaves to exert influence on their condition or that of their relatives'" (Figueroa 117).

Afterwards, abolitionists in Madrid enacted six bills to end slavery in Puerto Rico. Already on the path to full emancipation, on March 22nd of the year 1873, the Spanish Cortes passed the Mosquera bill. The approval of this bill meant that the slaves would be granted "freedom" but they would still have to forcibly work in public works with the colonial state, with their old masters, or someone else for a period of three years (Figueroa 119). The former masters would also be given compensation for the lost property. This conditional freedom did not mean there was a lot more improvement, apart from the enslaved people now being called

emancipados. Slowly but surely, the three years went by. Finally, after much postponing, full emancipation was granted on March 30th of the year 1876.

During the last years of Spanish colonization in the island, the methods that were used to maintain racial inequality did not cease, they merely transformed. While the former enslaved people were now legally free, the concrete definition of that freedom would vary and sometimes dwell on the side of a sort of neo-slavery. Citing Francisco Scarano, Luis Figueroa asserts that: "A majority of the freedmen in Puerto Rico was compelled to remain on the estates as resident workers, without a significant change in living standards or in opportunity for social advancement" (Figueroa 127). Some of them would enter into contracts without any monetary compensation for their work, but they were offered food and clothing. Others had to abide by contracts which essentially said that they would have to show strict obedience or they would face harsh consequences. The Spanish still had a chokehold on all Boricuas. Yet, in the following century, every facet of Puerto Rican society was about to be turned upside down.

Chapter 2: Recognizing Women's Voices in the Puerto Rican Tradition of Resistance

Three Women Rebel

"Every book I have ever read has been written by a man." I stood in front of my bookshelf in awe of this sudden realization. Immediately, I began a furious Google search, and purchased a handful of books written by women. Since I also wanted to awaken my knowledge of the French language that I gained during my bachelor's, I began with French women writers. Simone de Beauvoir, Christine de Pizan, and George Sand got me started on my journey. In the months that followed, every book I read was written by women writers. However, after a while I realized the books I was reading were written by white, European women. This is when I noticed that my choices had been influenced by the colonialist discourse I heard all my life which proposed that anything that is foreign or American or European is better than anything created in Puerto Rico.

My book search got rerouted to the literature that was closest to me. My exploration led me to the work of one of the writers I am centering in this chapter: Luisa Capetillo. I was fascinated by this woman. I knew there were more like her, and I wanted to find out. I developed a passion for feminist literature which led me to where I am today. It also sparked an interest in Puerto Rico's history. As I looked for online sources regarding Puerto Rico for this project, I found that there weren't that many—much less information about Puerto Rican women. It was definitely a limiting factor in my research, and it is a gap I am trying to fill. Also, while reading books about Puerto Rican history I noticed something: there were no mentions of women. On the off chance that there were, it only amounted to one or two sentences. This is why I have decided to dedicate an entire chapter to three women that stood out to me: Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luisa

Capetillo, and Julia de Burgos. They are also proof that Puerto Rican women have been fighting against the rotten patriarchal roots that plague the island's history.

When I read Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" her burning question became my own (Spivak). In order to find a response, I propose to explore the overlooked history of resistance and liberatory efforts carried out by those on the margins, specifically Puerto Rican women. I am particularly interested in tracing moments of subversion in the lives and works of Rodríguez de Tió, Capetillo, and Burgos. Could they speak out against oppression? How did their writings deviate from the norm? What can we find when we look at these three women together? Their works are alive with resistance. They find ways to establish their own voices and make their own choices, sharing the impulse to face the patriarchal order head-on. Some of the threads that link the writings of these three women are subversive notions of identity and gender roles. Their work locates and dismantles structures of power, demanding that their voices be heard and inspiring other women to do the same. I will emphasize these connections, analyzing how each of them question their imposed identities and gender roles. In addition, I will examine Lola Rodríguez de Tió's influence on the independence movement and Luisa Capetillo's on the feminist movement within the island. I will further analyze Rodríguez's song "La Borinqueña" in conjunction with Capetillo's feminist treatise *My Opinion* to illustrate how, together, their works contributed to the development of a Puerto Rican subaltern voice. Finally, I will focus on Julia de Burgos' poems "To Julia de Burgos," "I Became My Own Path," and "Ay Ay Ay for the Kinky Black Woman" to highlight her construction of the female subject, the defiance of gender roles, and her celebration of Blackness.

Subversive Song: Machete Afilao'

Dolores Rodríguez de Astudillo y Ponce de León (1843-1924), later known as Lola Rodríguez de Tió, was born in a time when the island was still under Spanish rule and slavery was not yet abolished. She came from a privileged family, as can be seen from certain images that depict her wearing a fine blouse decorated with lace, three necklaces (one of them made of pearls), a bracelet, and a ring. Her privilege also extended to her education; her father was a lawyer and she received better schooling than most of her other peers around her age. She became an ally for the independence movement, and she lived through the aforementioned Grito de Lares on 1868 (René Ramos). Even if the revolt failed, this revolutionary effort showed that Puerto Ricans wanted to change their political situation and gain independence —a sentiment exemplified in Lola Rodríguez de Tió's song "La Borinqueña".

Even though she was a colonized subaltern subject, Lola Rodríguez de Tió showed a desire to defy the oppressive Spanish regime, being actively involved in political and intellectual activities. Inspired by the Lares revolt, she wrote "La Borinqueña" that same year, and it was meant to be the first Puerto Rican national anthem. It was rejected by government officials since it was deemed too subversive. In this song, she fearlessly portrays her anticolonial stance against Spain and her support for the independence movement. The first verses are a call to action directed at the Puerto Rican people:

Arise, boricua!

The call to arms has sounded!

Awake from the slumber,

it is time to fight! (Vézina 225)

She urges the borinqueños (the Puerto Rican people) to awaken from the centuries long "slumber" where they have been subjected to the atrocities committed by the Spanish. This is an invitation to fight for sovereignty and rebel against the established colonial order. For too long—376 years at the time—they had been living in a subordinate condition. The awakened Boricuas will lead the revolution against their enemy.

She invites the people to respond to the "patriotic call" burning in their hearts, and to follow the example of Cuba where the revolution had been successful. This passionate call to arms serves as a guiding force throughout the song, and the significance of the machete as an indispensable revolutionary tool is continually stressed ("Y los machetes afilados están" which translates into English as "And the machetes are sharpened.") However, what stands out the most from this song is her inclusion of women within the revolutionary struggle:

> We no longer want despots,
>
> may the tyrant fall now;
>
> the indomitable women
>
> will also know how to fight (Vézina 225)

Rodríguez de Tió acknowledges women's role in the revolution while highlighting their indomitable spirit. When she imagines the revolution, she hears women's voices alongside that of men's like in the Grito de Lares. She penetrates the predominantly male-centered war discourse and pierces it with her voice. In her poetry there is a double recognition of the subaltern's speech. There is a simultaneous coexistence between her voice that speaks through the text, and the voices of the revolutionary women she addresses. She rejects the patriarchal

tradition by identifying women as a locus of power—as warriors in a revolution. Here, women are not muted subaltern subjects. Their voice, sharp as a machete, will signal the beginning of the revolution and will sever the binds of colonialism. Women have the power to destroy tyrants.

Calladita no te ves más bonita

The incisive tradition of resistance by subaltern Puerto Rican voices is continued in the work of Luisa Capetillo Perón (1879-1922). She was born 36 years later than Rodríguez de Tió, on October 28, 1879. Much like Rodríguez de Tió, her upbringing was exceptional compared to that of other women at the time, given that her parents motivated her to develop her inquisitive mind and they encouraged philosophical debates in their household. Both of her parents were European immigrants (her mother was French and her father was Spanish) and they were "influenced by the lingering revolutionist ideologies present in Europe after the French Revolution of 1848 and brought those ideologies with them to Puerto Rico" (Walker vii). Her education deviates from the typical instruction women received in the late 19th and early 20th century, which was mostly centered on household affairs and a lack of critical thinking due mostly to the strong Christian Catholic tradition in the island. From a young age, Luisa Capetillo's dissenting voice was nurtured and stood out from the rest.

Her work marks a shift away from the desire for independence in Rodríguez de Tió towards an anarchist revolution, reacting to the transition from a precapitalist society into a capitalist mode of production. This change responds to a major historical event that still affects the lives of Puerto Ricans today: the U.S. invasion in 1898. Along with the invasion, the capitalist boom spread throughout the island. The U.S. government claimed to bring progress and democracy to the island, while in fact doing the opposite as we will see in the following chapters. Some scholars describe the initial U.S. rule as "the imperialism of abandonment," which was

characterized by “the excessive power of absentee corporations, the senseless policy of Americanization, and a series of bewildering social problems, such as growing unemployment, poverty, bad health and living conditions, and emigration” (Matos-Rodríguez 86). Luisa Capetillo experienced these modes of exploitation firsthand when she worked as a reader in the tobacco factories.

Surrounded by factory workers and the incessant noise of machinery, her voice was heard as she read “some of the most important political, philosophical, and literary works coming from Europe and other parts of the world” (Matos-Rodríguez xvii). Given that the majority of the Puerto Rican proletariat was illiterate at the time, she played an essential role in their education and development of a class consciousness. The texts she read to the tobacco workers also informed her own political thinking, which was influenced by but not limited to the works of Tolstoy, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Zola, Mill, Maupassant, and Voltaire. This is an extraordinary instance where the subaltern woman’s voice was not only heard loud and clear, but also shaped men’s thinking. It also helped organize a worker’s liberation movement as well as the women’s rights movement.

Working as a factory reader was just the beginning of her efforts to fight against the hegemonic powers of the government. In 1911, she wrote the first feminist treatise in Puerto Rico entitled *My opinion on the liberties, rights and responsibilities of women*, where she denounced the corrupt government and pinpointed women’s faulty education as a major source of their oppression. Capetillo described women’s subordinated condition, advocated for equal rights, and proposed an anarchist revolution as a tool for liberation. She states that “the obstacles placed by social formulas make women be silent” illustrating the presence of Spivak’s silenced subaltern woman in Puerto Rico (Matos-Rodríguez 122).

Puerto Rican women experience the intersection of multiple structures of domination inflected by race, gender, and class which work together to rob them of their voice. As demonstrated by Spivak: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Nelson 82). Although it seems like the subaltern doesn't have a history, as we saw in the first chapter, we know that this erasure comes from what decoloniality deems the dark side of modernity. Through border thinking and epistemic disobedience, we see what has been hidden. Capetillo proposes that in order to move out of the shadows "we must make others understand that we know our rights, and that if they trample on those rights, we have the right to remind them that we are incensed by the injustice of it" (Matos-Rodríguez 79). She passionately invites women to demand their rights, echoing Rodríguez de Tió's call to action. While Rodríguez de Tió's resentment was limited to the Spanish government, Capetillo's discontent extends to the rest of the Puerto Rican population as well, namely the men that preserve and benefit from the patriarchal order.

Luisa Capetillo is also critical of the attitudes of women of the bourgeoisie. Recognizing the heterogeneous nature of the colonized subaltern subject, she condemns women that blindly adhere to gender norms. She disdains the submissive housewives that dare not raise their voices louder than a delicate, polite tone and whose main worry is their beauty. These women fall under the category of what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "well-cared-for pets" (Harding 109). In this case, their higher economic status prevents them from seeing that they are not exempt from dehumanization. They are judged favorably as long as they stay in their place, living by the old expression "calladita te ves más bonita," which roughly translates to "you look prettier when you're quiet." Evidently, the patriarchal order does not allow for a variation of this expression that applies to men. "Calladito te ves más bonito" does not exist because men hold the privilege

to speak—the authoritative universal voice is male. Among the salient patriarchal strategies of oppression lies the power to decide who can speak and who must be silent.

Luisa, like her predecessor Lola, wants women to scream and fight; committing themselves wholeheartedly to the women's liberation movement. In her view "women nowadays dedicate all their energy, all their attention to their appearance… they squander all their intelligence in trying to become more beautiful" (Matos-Rodríguez 8). With the education she received through literary texts, she was likely familiar with this social problem which Mary Wollstonecraft tackles in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Like Wollstonecraft, she believes that women should not waste their time by making themselves mere dolls, and that they should acquire strength of mind and body through education. Their energy should be invested in nurturing their intellect so they can become aware of the mechanisms that have silenced them and find ways to effect radical change. Capetillo adds that "the silence and seclusion of women is unacceptable" and she underscores the need for women to speak for themselves (Matos-Rodríguez 19). She protests against the dominant patriarchal idea that women had been given too much freedom and that they should content themselves by merely dedicating their lives to household chores.

Actively defying misogynistic ideals, she manifested her egalitarian beliefs through her writings and in the way she lived her life. She became a member and a prominent leader of the Free Federation of Workers. This was Puerto Rico's most important labor organization at the time. Women's participation in the working-class struggles engendered a new conception of the woman as "comrade," of which Luisa Capetillo was the most radical expression (Acosta-Belén 54). Apart from writing propaganda, she traveled throughout the island organizing strikes and educating workers. Her activist work which sought to improve the lives of the marginalized was

aimed at including women and working-class men who were being treated terribly by the government. For Capetillo, the labor system implemented after the U.S. invasion only reflected the interests of the American colonizers, and it was a new form of enslavement for the Puerto Rican people. Her goal was to dismantle the structural issues of class and gender oppression while spreading her message of the importance of alliance between subaltern subjects. However, her brave efforts and radical ideas were not always welcome, which brings me to the question: what happens once the subaltern speaks?

Repercussions

In 1912, Luisa Capetillo moved to New York to avoid being arrested or harassed due to the Puerto Rican government's systematic repression of anarchists in the island. "Anarchist leaders were imprisoned, study centers closed, and printed materials were confiscated" during this repressive time (Matos-Rodríguez xxi). Staying in that hostile environment while voicing her anarchist and feminist beliefs could have landed her in jail, or worse. Three years later, she moved to Cuba where she continued to express her progressive ideas. This time, she chose to "speak" through her fashion choices by wearing pants in public, thereby disrupting the established gender norms. In the summer of 1915, she was arrested for daring to wear trousers in public. Some view her today as a queer icon for crossing gender lines and sporting attire that was considered manly. She chose to wear pants even if women were supposed to wear skirts. It is as if she was (impossibly) familiar with Judith Butler's gender performativity (Butler). She was set free, but ultimately the government did not approve of her continuous anarchist activities. She was deported in 1916 and returned to her motherland.

Lola Rodríguez de Tió also suffered the consequences of voicing her opinion. The government's rejection of La Borinqueña as the national anthem was followed by threats,

vigilance, and hostility towards Lola and her husband Bonocio (Tió 3). Fear did not stop her revolutionary project. When slavery was abolished in 1873, she became the first woman to speak at a public event to celebrate the end of 380 years of slavery in Puerto Rico (Tió 3). In her speech, she demanded the end of censorship and voiced her support of freedom of speech. She also expressed her desire for the Puerto Rican people to have more control over political affairs and she stressed the need for women's education, as Luisa Capetillo did. Afterwards, the government's hostility intensified, to the point where she and her husband were accused of conspiracy and they were exiled to Venezuela. When they returned to Puerto Rico, their indomitable spirits could not be silenced. They continued their anti-colonial activism and promoting freedom. In 1890, they were exiled to Cuba.

The examples mentioned above testify to the real-life consequences that can unfold when the subaltern speaks. Lola and Luisa both feared for their safety. They fled their homeland for fear of retribution. The end of Spanish colonialism did not amount to the creation of a sovereign nation where the people were treated fairly and they could voice their concerns. During the first quarter of the 20th century, women joined the work force and had a significant influence in the island's economy working mostly in the needlework industry, tobacco factories, and domestic services. By the mid-twentieth century, women's situation did not improve in a significant way. They still "occupy a clear subordinate position to men, are limited to their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters, and are valued or judged by their moral behavior according to standards imposed by men" (Acosta-Belén 127). Albeit to a lesser extent, some of these issues still prevail in society today. Lola Rodríguez de Tió and Luisa Capetillo teach us that in Puerto Rico, when the subaltern speaks, she has to scream in order to be heard. Lola and Luisa are two exceptional examples that disrupt the dominant historical construction of women as muted subaltern subjects

during the late 19th and early 20th century. But, did the subaltern Puerto Rican tradition change toward the 1950s? A close look at a third feminist subaltern voice will help us answer this question.

Becoming Her Own Path

Born on February 17, 1914, Julia Constanza Burgos García (1914-1953) became one of the most celebrated Puerto Rican literary voices. She reveals in her poetry a project of self-redefinition as an Afro-Puerto Rican woman. However, as we have seen with Luisa and Lola, radical feminists were not accepted by the imperialist powers in Puerto Rico. As the illusion of improvement after the U.S. invasion was shattered, the tradition of resistance lived on. Julia de Burgos' quest for liberation was not only evident in her poetry, but also in her participation in politics. She was an avid supporter of the independence movement in Puerto Rico spearheaded by Pedro Albizu Campos, a topic that will be expanded in the next chapter. Even though there was a growing literary movement in the island that attempted to trace a Puerto Rican identity, Burgos was not accepted in it. The literary movement was dominated by men and steeped in sexist ideologies. The use of lyric poetry was not considered a respected genre. Consequently, the merit of her writing was not acknowledged. She was further marginalized for being a divorced woman who was proud of her African heritage in a society that was dominated by conservative, patriarchal, racist, and religious beliefs. In 1940, she moved to New York where she wrote freely and significantly contributed to the development of the Nuyorican movement.

Julia de Burgos used her poetry as a means of self-discovery, identifying the multidirected forces of oppression suffered by the Puerto Rican subaltern. In this sense, she anticipated Kimberlé Crenshaw's expansion of feminist theory and anti-racist politcs by acknowledging the intersectional nature of oppression. According to Crenshaw: "Because the

intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 133). Julia de Burgos experiences racism, sexism, and the added layer of colonialism. In her poetry, she identifies her subaltern subjectivity as an assemblage of multiple social relationships inflected by different class, cultural and ethnic specificities.

When she writes the poem "To Julia de Burgos," she locates the sites of these intersecting oppressive forces and she finds the essence of her voice:

> Already people whisper that I am your enemy
>
> because they say in poetry I give you to the world.
>
> They lie, Julia de Burgos. They lie, Julia de Burgos.
>
> The voice that rises up in my poems is not yours. It's my voice
>
> because you are the garment and I am the essence
>
> and between us stretches the deepest chasm. (Santiago 142)

This first stanza establishes a dialectical relationship between "you" and "I." The "I" refers to Julia de Burgos' true voice. It is the essence—the voice that rises up in her poems. This voice is speaking to another one, the "you" that is the garment. A superficial exterior. The site of oppression. The woman that patriarchal ideology wants her to be. A well-cared-for pet that stays quietly in her place. In this poem dedicated to herself, Julia de Burgos creates a chasm between the woman that society wants her to be and the woman that she truly is. By embracing the creative potential of her "outsider within status" like Hill Collins suggests, she testifies to the

unsilenced subaltern woman. She does not let herself be defined by her marginality. Rather, she uses poetry to find her essence, which escape the narrow limits of the imposed societal expectations of what a woman should be.

In “I Became My Own Path” she continues to weave her subaltern identity through her poetry. This poem shows her resistance towards the collective pressure on the subaltern woman to adhere to gender roles. She portrays herself as a nomadic subject that rewrites the paths of patriarchal culture—the architect of her destiny:

I wanted to be like men wanted me to be—

an attempted life

in a game of hide and seek to find the real me.

But I was living for the moment

and my feet firmly planted on promising land

refused to backtrack.

Instead, they continued plodding ever forward

eluding the ashes to reach the embrace

of uncharted paths. (Santiago 255)

She recounts her past as she remembers a time when her life was not her own. Like Luisa, she challenged the imposed identity and gender roles that wanted her to stay in the shadows. A silent simulacrum. Leading a lifeless life that amounted to an attempt and nothing more. However, in

spite of the interlocking oppressive forces that were acting on her, she resists being reduced to a docile, subjected body. Her feet march onward towards liberation. In a sense, she listens to Lola's call to rise up, and to Luisa's invitation to overcome the obstacles that silence women. Her poetry challenges the notion of the voiceless oppressed by affirming her voice and rejecting the role of the silent woman. She escapes gender-specific roles by "becoming her own path" and following her inner voice.

Blackness Celebrated

Julia's acknowledgement of her Blackness is a notable difference between her writings and the works written by the previously discussed feminists. While Lola and Luisa recognize the African presence as part of their identity, their works do not highlight their Afro-Puerto Rican experience. For Julia, her Blackness is a source of pride, as clearly depicted in the poem "Ay Ay Ay for the Kinky Black Woman." She writes: "Ay ay ay, I'm kinky haired and pure black; / proud my hair is kinky, proud of my fierce lips / and flat Mozambican nose" (Santiago 80). Her hair, skin, lips, and nose are indicative of phenotypically African features. Julia embraces her physical traits that are regarded as inferior in the prevailing Eurocentric notions of beauty as we saw in the first chapter. "In a society where Western cultural hegemony is deeply valued and where whiteness stands as a paragon of beauty, Burgos turns to her African-Caribbean heritage, to the mulatta's beauty, strength, and power to heal as a unifying archetype" (Springfield 10).

Puerto Rico is often depicted as a nation impervious to racism. As I noted in the first chapter, this is false. One of the reasons for this is the concept of mestizaje or race-mixture, which is defined as "the false notion that all Puerto Ricans come from the same ethno-racial 'recipe' of European, indigenous, and African blood" (Haslip-Viera 74). Mestizaje invisibilizes the complex historical events that led to a specific understanding of race. Nonetheless, Julia de

Burgos creates her own identity and embraces the Blackness that hegemonic powers have systematically suppressed. As Frantz Fanon says in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his jungle" (Fanon 18). While the notion of mestizaje was a tool for imposing Spain's cultural standards on the Puerto Rican people, women like Julia fought against this whitening process. This is important because she was the first Puerto Rican published writer to embrace her African ancestry and how it created her mulatta identity (Springfield 10).

Julia de Burgos renounces whiteness and embraces her "jungle." Radical self-love and acceptance permeate her poetry. She does precisely what Fanon encourages Black men to do, which is "to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (Fanon 30). She frees herself from the meek, weak, semblance of a woman that colonialism has dictated. She dismantles gender and racial inequality. In her poetry, Julia deploys a reversal of the dominant colonial discourse, revealing the presence of her African heritage. Blackness is erased by the colonial environment, but Julia creates a new inclusive vision. Her fierce lips are a source of pride and a tool for resistance. Her poetry provides an arsenal to speak out against the colonial and patriarchal regimes.

Then and Now

Puerto Rican women's literature and its oft-forgotten liberatory struggles shed light on different ways in which Spivak's subaltern can speak. Women's subaltern experience in Puerto Rico must be analyzed in terms of their own specific histories of colonialism, gender hierarchy, and racial construction. While this analysis is by no means comprehensive, it identifies key instances in which the colonized subaltern subject speaks. First, Lola Rodríguez de Tió's fierce

call to action undermines the necropolitical Spanish colonial regime and impels women to join the fight for independence. The subaltern's efforts of resistance continue with Luisa Capetillo's work, where she also acknowledges the role women should have in society. Capetillo dismantles the structures of power that silence women, inviting them to demand their rights. Lastly, Julia de Burgos rejects the subordinated status imposed on women and she creates her own identity. She locates the interlocking forces of oppression that aim to subjugate her and, through her poetry, she identifies new ways to define her subaltern identity that functions as a mechanism of liberation. These three women dedicated their lives to speaking out against the hegemonic powers that aimed to keep them silent. The tradition of resistance in Puerto Rican literature serves as a guide to trace the subaltern's speech. While there were attempts to silence the voices of Lola, Luisa, and Julia, we can still hear them in the year 2023. They set the foundation for future women like me to find our own voices.

Today, the feminist movement is louder than ever. There has been a revival of Luisa Capetillo's work, with her inclusion in a new anthology about anarchism (Meléndez Badillo) and a book with new compiled essays about her work (Ramos). In other areas focused on feminism, Marisol LeBrón wrote an article about policing and decolonial feminism (Lebrón), and Miari Taina Stephens published another article centering Black feminist organizing in the island and cyberfeminist networks (Stephens). In terms of decolonial praxis, there are many activist organizations which are at the center of the fight against the patriarchy, such as La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, Taller Salud, and Con(Sentimientos) whose Instagram handles are @colectivafeministapr, @tallersalud, and @con.sentimientospr respectively. There are also several podcasts which highlight feminist and anti-racist work. My favorite is Negras—a show

produced by the University of Puerto Rico, which calls attention to Afro-descendant women and racialization.

Chapter 3: Colonialism Continued

Government-Sanctioned Injustices in the 20th Century

As I think about justice for Puerto Rico, I recognize an intersection of variables which stack up and create a skyscraper of inequalities. In general terms, Puerto Rico needs economic, political, and cultural justice; spheres which are all contaminated with a structural inequality that has developed over the course of five-hundred and thirty years of colonization. The way Puerto Rican society's infrastructure is built today is the result of centuries-old imperialist processes that have never centered the needs of Boricuas. We have relentlessly been the victims of the colonial powers of Spain and the United States. In order to begin envisioning a free Puerto Rico, I want to look at multiple historical events that contributed to the creation or exacerbation of harms and injustices that led to a Puerto Rico marked by structural inequality. In my first chapter, I analyzed noteworthy atrocities committed by the Spanish spanning over three centuries, including the Taíno genocide, the appropriation of lands and goods, the insertion of enslaved Africans, religious violence, white supremacy, patriarchal constructions, and torture. Angelo Falcón writes that: "These exploitations and genocidal practices by Spain in Puerto Rico were never accounted for as the island's ownership switched hands to the Americans" (3). Now, I want to delve into the 20th century and the host of new necropolitical processes created by the United States which further worsened the situation of Boricuas in the island. While there are historical events in Puerto Rico that mirror unjust treatments in other countries, like the unfair treatment of factory workers, I will focus on events that are exclusive to Puerto Rico. I will analyze the Foraker Law, the Maritime Merchant Law, the Ponce Massacre, and the birth control experiments on Puerto Rican women.

The aftermath of many U.S. harms and injustices perpetrated in the 20th century is still tangible. Even though some of them occurred almost immediately after the United States acquired Puerto Rico as a territory in 1898, these events are part of a past that is not yet past. The issues that resulted as a consequence from these harms affect the everyday life of Puerto Ricans, and some of them are even a matter of life and death. The four events I underscore are issues that need resolving, or as I will argue in the next chapter, repair. Some people believe that these events are of an extraordinary nature, but when they are looked at together, we can recognize that there is a recognizable pattern of injustices that have never truly stopped. Treating Puerto Ricans as inferior is not an exception. The first two events I discuss are laws that deepened Puerto Rico's status as second-class citizens and further entrenched their lack of sovereignty. The other two events I discuss are situations in which Puerto Rican lives became disposable and there was a total lack of acknowledgement or consequences for the United States. One-hundred and twenty-five years have gone by and Puerto Ricans are still mistreated and exploited by the United States.

Painting a vivid picture of the day when North Americans invaded our land, Nelson A. Denis writes: "On May 12, cannon blasts awakened everyone in San Juan as twelve US battleships, destroyers, and torpedo boats bombarded the city for three hours, turning the sky black with cannon smoke" (Denis 13). While the Spanish were aware that there would be an attack by the U.S., they were unaware as to where the attack would take place. The United States' troops were able to easily penetrate and spread throughout the island. After coming in through the North, they later attacked from the South, until there were U.S. troops all over the island. On a small scale, this progress reflected the U.S. victories which had been occurring during the Spanish-American War. The Treaty of Paris, which favored the U.S. demands, was

signed on December 10 and it stipulated the transfer of Puerto Rico from Spain into the possession of the United States (Alegría 68). This power transfer ended the four centuries of Spanish rule in Puerto Rico. The treaty further promoted United States' imperialist project since it did not promise American citizenship and "there was no promise, actual or implied, of statehood" (Roman 1140). Puerto Ricans were relieved and they were hopeful that the United States' intervention would bring progress and better conditions, but they quickly realized this was not the case.

Separate and Unequal

In 1900, Congress approved the Foraker Law to establish a civil government in the island as a result of the agreement between congressional factions. They did not consider the opinions of the native leading sectors, nor did they consider the peoples' opinion. As explained by Ayala and Bernabe: "The Foraker Act created an insular government headed by a governor, a cabinet, and a five-member supreme court, all appointed by the president of the United States" (29). Moreover, this law didn't come from the hands of benevolent colonizers who wanted what was best for the islanders. They fashioned a civil government similar to theirs so that they could control the island with more ease. Moreover, the importance of this law was to formally establish that Puerto Rico belonged to the United States. José A. Cabranes states that:

> …the principal objective of granting American citizenship to Puerto Ricans was neither to incorporate Puerto Rico into the United States (and thereby to have the Constitution apply in all respects to the island and its people) nor to grant Puerto Ricans political and civil rights equal to those of citizens in the American Union proper. The objective, rather, was to 'recognize that Puerto Rico belongs to the United States of America.' (427)

From the onset, Puerto Rico became the *property* of the United States. The governor would not be chosen by Puerto Ricans, only by the U.S. President and Senate. In this way, Puerto Rico was passed down from the hands of colonizer to colonizer, and they weren't even aware of it yet. The U.S. even managed to sidestep the use of classic "colonial" language by referring to Puerto Rico as an "unincorporated territory" (Roman 1119). This law set the uneven foundation of a tradition for decades to come in which decisions were made without centering the peoples' needs, or taking their opinions into consideration. The U.S. wishes were to keep Puerto Ricans in their back pocket, like turquoise sea glass found on the beach.

Maritime Monopoly

The next event I will discuss is the institution of the Maritime Merchant Act of 1920. (This act is also known as the Jones Act, but I will refer to it as the Maritime Merchant Act to avoid confusion with the 1917 Jones Act which granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans.) As stated in the Congressional Research Service report: "The Jones Act, which refers to Section 27 of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 (P.L. 66-261), requires that vessels transporting cargo from one U.S. point to another U.S. point be U.S.-built, and owned and crewed by U.S. citizens" (Frittelli). Just as I showed with the Foraker Act, this law did not have Puerto Rican's best interests in mind. First, the cabotage law was implemented to create jobs for Americans after World War I. Furthermore, vessels from other countries can't enter directly into Puerto Rico. As a result, "Jones Act shipping rates for Puerto Rico cost about twice as much as similar ships to neighboring islands" (Lincicome). A higher cost of goods coming from the U.S. also strangles Puerto Rico's economy. The negative effects felt on the island thanks to the Maritime Merchant Act do not end here.

Moreover, this cabotage law does not equal a more efficient means of transportation between ports. The ships available for transport are controlled by four major companies, totaling 13 eligible vessels (Lincicome). Eight of these are old boats which have a limited capacity for storing goods and are distinctly slower than modern barges. Finally, the Maritime Merchant Act creates a *de facto* monopoly on the ships and goods that Puerto Rico receives, hindering the island's economic development. This act has also limited the access to international markets and dissuaded foreign investment. Evidently, this is another measure that benefits the United States' interests at the cost of Puerto Ricans. For these reasons, there is a big push to eliminate this cabotage law.

The moment which most highlighted the need to lift the Maritime Merchant Act was in September 20, 2017, when Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico. Every inch of the island felt the effects of the hurricane. I remember wielding a machete to clear the entryway to my house from the impact of the fallen trees and debris. I was lucky enough that my family had a hefty food supply, but the rest of the Puerto Ricans did not have such good fortune. In the interest of brevity, among all of the needs that were heightened after impact, I will focus on the lack of goods like food and supplies that plagued the island. Noticeably, all of the lands where produce was grown were destroyed, and the cost of food that remained in grocery stores skyrocketed. The cost of a 24-pack of water bottles which usually cost about three dollars tripled overnight. We were in desperate need of aid, but as a result of several factors which will be addressed in the last chapter, we did not receive all the help we needed.

In a cry for help, the ex-governor Ricardo Rosselló requested to waive the cabotage law. However, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, only offered a 10-day waiver. It was not enough time for foreign ships to respond. For example, Thomas Grennes affirms that: "A

Norwegian-flag ship that was docked in New Orleans offered to take supplies to Puerto Rico, but the waiver expired before it could complete its voyage" (Grennes). History was repeated again after Hurricane Fiona made landfall on September 19, 2022—almost exactly 5 years later than Hurricane María. Ten days later, a foreign-flagged tanker with 300,000 barrels of diesel fuel arrived to a southern Puerto Rican port (Lincicome). This time, a waiver for this law was requested from President Joe Biden, but again, the White House refused, claiming that the law was recently modified to stop the president from issuing a blanket waiver. Therefore, due to the Maritime Merchant Act, the fuel was not delivered since the ship had a foreign flag. It is for these reasons that any path which leads Puerto Rico to justice must include an exemption from the Maritime Merchant Act. For the following event which exposes the repression and systemic violence of the U.S., we must go back in time a hundred years earlier.

Nationalism and Eugenics

In 1922, a group that advocated for independence—the Nationalist Party (NP)—was established. The most important member became the president of the NP in 1929. His name was Pedro Albizu Campos. He graduated from Harvard College and was attending Harvard Law School when he was assigned to the African American regiment at the beginning of WWI. He was the victim of racism in both his academic and military circles. When he graduated from Harvard Law School, he was the valedictorian but his professors did not want him to receive this honor and give his specch. They did not appreciate his mixed-race background, so they delayed his final exams so he would not graduate on time. The U.S. Army saw him as Black, but in the skin color scale that has endured since the days of the Spanish colonization, he would have been considered mulatto. His experiences in the Army informed how he saw the U.S.-P.R. relationship. As Victor Villanueva explained: "Albizu's exposure to U.S. racism within the

military affects his attitudes toward the U.S. and its relation to what he consistently referred to as the motherland, Puerto Rico" (Villanueva 634). After the war, he returned to Harvard to finish his law degree where he worked alongside leaders who were also interested in independence for their own countries, including Mahatma Gandhi and his work helping Irish leader Éamon de Valera draft the constitution of the Irish Free State. Then he continued to work towards independence in his motherland.

Once he was embedded in nationalist activism, Albizu Campos made big strides towards fighting inequality. In 1931, during his presidency of the Nationalist Party, he accused Dr. Cornelius Rhoads of an atrocity—a man who made the cover of Time Magazine and was celebrated for his cancer research. Albizu Campos accused Rhoads, who was working with the Rockefeller Institute, of "deliberately infecting several Puerto Rican citizens with cancer, causing the deaths of thirteen" (Villanueva 634). The doctor, supporter of eugenics, admitted the charge as he insulted Puerto Rican citizens and justified the need to exterminate them by calling them "the most degenerate and thievish race of men" in a letter he wrote to his colleague (Villanueva 634). In that same letter, he wrote: "What the island needs is not public health work but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population. It might then be livable. I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off 8 and transplanting cancer into several more" (Guzman). Even though Pedro Albizu Campos was right, afterwards, the government began heavy policing and surveillance of nationalists related to the independence movement, and he suffered the consequences.

An incident followed in 1935 in which four nationalists were killed under the command of Colonel E. Francis Riggs. The next year, two nationalists killed the Colonel and then were executed without trial. Declaring the executed nationalists heroes, Pedro Albizu Campos was

arrested, accused of sedition, and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. In 1948, an anti-sedition law called La Ley de la Mordaza/Law 53 or the Gag Law was passed. Ivonne Acosta-Lespier clearly states that:

> Law 53 made it a felony "to encourage, defend, counsel, or preach, voluntarily or knowingly, the need, desirability, or convenience of overturning, destroying, or paralyzing the Insular Government, or any of its political subdivisions, by way of force or violence; and to publish, edit, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly exhibit with the intention to overturn…"[5] (Acosta-Lespier 59)

Albizu's crime had been expressing his support for the independence movement. He was well-known for his fiery speeches and his heavy opposition to colonialism. His words had been his weapons.

The Ponce Massacre

This repressive regime reached its peak on a calm Palm Sunday on March 21st, 1937. Political tensions rose throughout the years and led to *the* island's massacre of the 20th century. This time the nationalists weren't giving a spirited speech. They had not attacked anyone or shown any violence. They were *walking*. Men, women, and children came dressed in their Sunday best from all over Puerto Rico to Ponce waving palm fronds. Yet, over two-hundred were injured and twenty-one were dead (Suarez-Pottsm 10). Nationalists had organized a peaceful march to celebrate the one-hundred-year anniversary of the abolition of slavery and to protest the unjust incarceration of Pedro Albizu Campos, demanding his freedom and that of

[5] It was also illegal to sing patriotic tunes and to own or display the Puerto Rican flag.

other prisoners. They made sure their march was going to be peaceful, but General Blanton Winship had other plans.

The nationalists had filed the proper paperwork to secure the permission to march. However, at the very last minute, General Blanton Winship revoked the permission papers. As the people took their first steps, the violence began. What started out as an amicable walk, ended in bloodshed. The police came in with rifles, machine guns, Thompson submachine guns, and pistols and opened fire on the unarmed civilians for thirteen minutes (Denis). The marchers, all dressed in white, were drenched in blood. Bodies piled up on other bodies. Bodies splayed across the sidewalk. People had once again been victims of the very same repressive law which had gotten Pedro Albizu Campos arrested. They showed public support for the nationalists and started the march singing La Borinqueña—Puerto Rico's anthem. Yet, to this day, the U.S. never acknowledged the massacre. The U.S.-appointed governor and the policemen did not suffer any consequences or persecution. That fateful Palm Sunday remains the biggest massacre in Puerto Rico at the hands of the U.S. colonial force. And still, death and injury at the hands of the United States did not stop there.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights Violation

For over two decades, poor women of color in the island participated in non-consensual experiments in which they were effectively used as lab animals to test different birth control methods. Dr. Gregory Pincus was an American scientist who worked in experimental biology and co-founded the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology. He was devoted to finding a new method of contraception. Dr. Pincus noticed that it would be easier to conduct birth control experiments in Puerto Rico than in the United States. Puerto Rico met the criteria of a favorable political climate and the availability of a collaborative team. Annette B. Ramírez de

Arellano, who wrote the book *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*, says that: "Puerto Rico met a third, unstated criterion: its poverty and high population density provided a useful rationale for its selection as a testing ground" (109). The location that was ultimately chosen for this study was an urban housing development project in a slum clearance area in Río Piedras (Ramírez de Arellano 113). The conditions were perfect for Dr. Pincus to proceed with his trials.

The experiments officially started in 1955. During the first full-fledged trial, the one-hundred women chosen were instructed to take ten-milligram progestin pills, which according to modern-day standards contained three times as more hormones. Shortly after starting the regimen, women started complaining "of nausea, dizziness, headache, and vomiting…" (Ramírez de Arellano 115). An "improved" version of this pill took the name of Enovid, and it was used on two-hundred and twenty-one women. The women ended up having exactly the same types of side effects as with the first trial. The medical director of the Family Planning Association, Dr. Edris Rice-Wray, stated that: "while Enovid gave 100 percent protection against pregnancy, it caused too many side effects to be acceptable generally" (Ramírez de Arellano 116). And yet, Dr. Pincus did not stop his pursuit, and blamed the outcomes on the women, saying that the San Juan women were too emotional.[6] In the next trial, they violated two fundamental tenets of consent in medical research: "that subjects be given a full explanation of the nature, duration, and purpose of the study and a description of discomforts and risks" (Ramírez de Arellano 117). The group of women received the Enovid pill but they had not been informed about the side

[6] Further research showed that Dr. Pincus also experimented on schizophrenic men at the Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts by performing testicular biopsies without anesthesia.

effects. Dr. Pincus continued to make these unethical and immoral decisions which affected the lives of hundreds of women.

The experiments expanded beyond Río Piedras and reached a slum district in Humacao. The Humacao experiments resulted in the same findings as in Río Piedras, but a new side effect was uncovered that affected the participants' cervixes after six months. "Those who had had a slight cervical erosion before starting the medication experienced a worsening of the condition over time" (Ramírez de Arellano 118). In spite of the worsening side effects, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of Enovid by mid-1960. In one of the following trials three women died of cardiovascular incidents, which does not necessarily mean they died because of Enovid. However, in a later experiment, two young women who took Enovid had spontaneous blood clots and died. In September 1962, a conference was called which confirmed the deaths of eleven women due to thrombosis and embolism. Finally, five years later, "a British Medical Research Council task force concluded that 'there can be no reasonable doubt that some types of thromboembolic disorder are associated with the use of oral contraceptives'" (Ramírez de Arellano 123). These women were tortured, lied to, exploited, and killed, and this kind of treatment did not abate.

A paper written in 1992 by Joseph J. Salvo et al. shows that "Puerto Rico has had the highest rate of sterilization in the world for over two decades" (219). Unsurprisingly, these weren't all done with the women's consent. Sometimes, pregnant women would undergo cesareans, and afterwards the physician would perform the procedure for sterilization without their knowledge. At the time, the Department of Health had no policies in relation to sterilization, meaning that the decisions were made by the hospital directors, and, most often, the physicians (Mayone). The requirements for deciding who could get the operation were relaxed,

and post-partum sterilizations became almost routine. Women who had had children were most commonly the subjects of sterilization but there were few cases in which childless women received it as well. Some women would accept the surgery but were not informed of potential side effects. Others would accept it because they thought it was the only successful method of birth control. Nonetheless, sterilization was favored by U.S. eugenicists in order to end the over-population problem. Not unlike Dr. Cornelius Rhoads who infected Puerto Rican citizens with cancer and killed thirteen of them, these eugenicists believed that Puerto Ricans needed to be taken care of. A survey carried out in 1965 found that: "…roughly one-third of all Puerto Rican mothers between the ages of twenty and forty-nine were sterilized, a rate significantly higher than that of any other country" (Ramírez de Arellano 143).

The U.S./P.R. Toxic Relationship

U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico has consistently shown that the needs of the Boricuas come second to the U.S. interests in all respects. It is like a toxic, forced co-dependent relationship, in which the United States is unable to leave Puerto Rico due to all the benefits it receives from it. Simultaneously, the U.S. renders it nearly impossible for Puerto Rico to break the relationship since its confidence and freedom is being constantly put down. Moreover, the U.S. regularly gaslights Puerto Rico into thinking that the issues they have today are all of their own making. While this relationship is not exclusively non-beneficial for Puerto Ricans, I think it is important to note that Puerto Rico's status today is severely affected by all the hurt done at the hands of the United States. Before a separation, an inventory must be taken in which the U.S. makes an honest stock recognizing all the benefits it has received from Puerto Rico. A method must then be used to return the goods acquired in the relationship, and an acknowledgement of

all the damages the U.S. has done as it kept Puerto Rico in bondage. This is all required so that Puerto Rico can finally be free.

Chapter 4: Reparations: A Step Towards Independence

Puerto Rico: A Case for Reparations

When we think of the word reparation, what is the first thing that comes to mind? I think about something which has been broken that needs to be fixed, which is the first definition provided by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary. In the case of Puerto Rico, many things are broken. The inability to have an autonomous government, the uneven distribution of wealth, austerity measures, racism, governmental neglect, structural violence, the healthcare crisis, the defunding of public education, and a myriad of other misfortunes affect Puerto Ricans on a daily basis. Who is responsible for these conditions? While it is clear that Puerto Ricans have played a part in this, we must keep in mind that as soon as Puerto Rico became property of the U.S. in 1898, it was turned into an area to be used for exploitation and profit. Since its inception, Puerto Rico became a location of significant economic importance. It was recognized as a prime location where corporations could set up shop and not have to deal with the consequences of paying taxes. The island became a sort of Disneyland for Americans to hacer y deshacer.[7] The recent terms that describe our relationship to the U.S. classifies Puerto Rico as an "unincorporated territory" and a "commonwealth," while truly we are a colony and *still* the property of the U.S. Although colonialism seems like a trace from the past, the U.S. actively preserves a colonial relationship with Puerto Rico.

The second definition of the term "reparations" goes more in tune to the idea that I want to dive into: "the act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury" ("Reparations"). Making amends requires that the culpable party acknowledge their

[7] Literally translated as "do and undo." The colloquial meaning is known as "to use and abuse according to one's liking," or "to do whatever you want without consequences."

wrongdoing and own up to the role they played in the injustices they executed against the innocent party. In the case of Puerto Rico, the naming of the culpable party becomes complicated. Who set the stage for the harms and injustices that were to come and haunt us until today? Was it the Spanish when they invaded our land, perpetrated a genocide against the Taínos, stole every last bit of gold in our rivers and mines, instilled slavery, took our land, and the 400 years' worth of atrocities that were to come? Or perhaps was it the fact that the U.S. invasion brought upon us conditions which led to poverty, unjust labor with terrible working conditions, ongoing economic depression, the use of our men as disposable lives for WWI and WWII, the taking and destruction of our lands in Vieques for military practice, using poor women as lab rats to conduct experiments with the birth control pill which resulted in several deaths and led to high levels of infertility, the Foraker Act, The Jones Act, the U.S. negligence when Puerto Ricans desperately needed help after Hurricane María, and an innumerable other atrocities? While there is a case for reparations to be made with the Spanish, this project will focus on the harms and injustices perpetrated by the U.S. The U.S. still upholds laws and policies which have harmed and continue to harm us, while justice for Puerto Ricans remains out of sight. I propose the consideration of a reparations program to account for the atrocities committed against Puerto Ricans during the entire period of colonization by the United States.

Expanding Reparations for African American Descendants of Slaves

There are many writers and scholars engaging with the topic of reparations today, including Hilary Beckles, Boris Bittker, and Allan Cooper. Most recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates reignited the conversation about reparations for enslaved African Americans with his 2014 article in *The Atlantic* titled "The Case for Reparations," where he writes that "What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts" (Coates). Here, I am thinking with top

scholars Dr. William "Sandy" Darity and Dr. Kirsten Mullen and their proposal to acknowledge, redress, and achieve closure for the grievous atrocities experienced by Black Americans descendants of enslaved people (Mullen and Darity). In Darity and Mullen's three-step process, the culpable party recognizes there has been a harm, and that they have benefited from this act. Moreover, there must be an act of restitution where the victims' grievances are accounted for and redressed. While Drs. Darity and Mullen formulated a measure called the racial wealth gap to account for the Black/white wealth differential, I have not found such a measure which would apply to Puerto Rican reparations. Finally, an understanding should be reached in which both the culpable party and the victims agree that the debt has been paid and no further action is needed (Darity). I will adapt the methodology followed for ADOS (African American descendants of slaves) to the Puerto Rican context, and consider several events that have deepened the chasm of inequality between the culpable party and the victims which demand reparations. The list of events that I propose is *incomplete*, and a deeper study must be made to account for more cases in which the U.S. has benefited from Puerto Rico to more adequately gauge the reparations needed. I will also consider the paper "Reparations Theory and Postcolonial Puerto Rico: Some Preliminary Thoughts" written by Pedro A. Malavet, which is the sole work I have found on this subject.

Darity and Mullen pinpoint three time periods where the injustices against Black people began, starting from slavery in 1776 until 1865. They identify slavery as a crucible that created a subsequent array of atrocities committed by white supremacy in the U.S. (Darity). The second period is the nearly one-hundred years of racial segregation in the Jim Crow period, where lynchings, police brutality, and murders of Black people were still ongoing. I want to emphasize

that it is 2023 and these attacks have not stopped. Finally, there is the white mob violence and the perpetual damages after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

In Puerto Rico's case, the identification of discrete moments of atrocities are difficult to distinguish. We can begin by separating Spanish colonization from American colonization. The first genocide on the island was the decimation of the Taínos ("Puerto Rico"). Since the arrival of Spanish troops in Puerto Rico, Taínos were exposed to deadly diseases, they were worked to death, and the women were abused and raped. Taínos were unjustly treated as if their lives were disposable. An example of the atrocities committed against Taínos is the following: "… every Taíno over the age of fourteen had to produce a hawk's bell of gold every three months or have their hands cut off" (Denis). It didn't matter if one of them died since they could be immediately replaced with another. Reparations in this case would have to take into account the value of the gold that was extracted, the number of hours "worked," the land that was stolen, and the physical and emotional harms. These events were followed by the involvement of Spain in chattel slavery from the period of 1513 until the abolition of slavery in 1873. In the first chapter, I explained in depth the construction of inequality and racism spanning the initial Spanish colonization period of 405 years, and in the third chapter I analyzed how inequality became even more entrenched in Puerto Rican society during the U.S. colonization. Although there is ample recorded evidence of the atrocities committed during the Spanish colonization period, the case for reparations during this time falls outside the scope of this study. Now it is time to consider a framework for reparations in the Puerto Rican context during the American colonization and possible paths towards sovereignty. First, I will conduct a literature review of the only full-length case for reparations for Puerto Rico written by Pedro A. Malavet during the "American century."

A Proposal

In his article "Reparations Theory and Postcolonial Puerto Rico: Some Preliminary Thoughts," Malavet writes about a concept he calls the democratic deficit, he underscores the ways in which Puerto Ricans have been subjugated, postcolonial alternatives, and his proposal for reparations. For 125 years now, Puerto Rico has been a source of great economic gain and major profits for the U.S. He states that the U.S. "has continuously used Puerto Rico for various military and private economic purposes during more than one hundred years of its second colonization" (Malavet 389). He offers specific ways in which the United States has benefited from and marginalized Boricuas, which will be discussed later. Moreover, the schema for reparations proposes four steps: "(1) the construction of sovereignty; (2) the return of property and monetary compensation for the occupation; (3) information disclosure; and (4) apology" (Malavet 412). Finally, he posits three postcolonial alternatives which are associated to the three dominant political parties: statehood, free association, and independence. I will analyze his views on how Puerto Ricans have been subjugated, how he imagines sovereignty, and the acts that the U.S. needs to repair. I will begin by using a concept which Malavet uses for explaining why Puerto Ricans are deprived of power.

True and False Inferiority

Malavet's concept of democratic deficit accounts for the obstacles Puerto Ricans need to overcome and explains why they are prevented from constructing their sovereignty. The democratic deficit concept serves as a tool used by the U.S. to keep Puerto Ricans marginalized. First, Puerto Ricans are unable to fully participate in the U.S. political processes: "The island Puerto Ricans lack a congressional delegation and are not allowed to vote in presidential elections" (Malavet 390). Puerto Ricans have one non-voting congressional delegate and they

can vote in primary elections, but are not permitted to vote in presidential elections. This creates an illusion of control or meaningful participation, but the reality is that Puerto Ricans have no true power within the federal government. Moreover, the citizenship bestowed upon them does not give them full constitutional rights and legally constructs them as second-class citizens. In this way, Puerto Ricans are legally "othered" as a result of the democratic deficit.

Not only are Puerto Ricans legally "othered," but they are also culturally "othered." Malavet argues that Puerto Ricans are culturally constructed in a way that is racist and essentialist, which is another tool for marginalization. In the first chapter, I explained how racism and "othering" were constructed by the Spanish as a way to dominate groups they deemed inferior, and I also worked with theoretical frameworks which analyze "othering," as proposed by Achille Mbembé, Sylvia Wynter, and Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings. Along those lines, Malavet observes that people of color are viewed as naturally inferior and occupy the matrix of "the other" in the U.S. Specifically, Malavet states that: "The dominant narrative, as reinforced by the United States, carefully cultivates the view that the people of Puerto Rico, despite their citizenship, are too brown, too Latina/o, and too 'foreign'—too unassimilable—to be incorporated into the United States" (Malavet 418). Viewing Puerto Ricans as "too foreign" further victimizes them, creating more space between the colonial power and the colonized, and undermining a group that is already treated as second-class citizens.

This legal and cultural "othering" has led to what Malavet deems "the crisis of self-confidence." He affirms that: "This form of internalized oppression that afflicts the people of Puerto Rico leads them to conclude that they are incapable of self-government" (Malavet 418). Internalized oppression works in a way that can be thought of as when a bully steps so frequently and constantly on the victim, that the victim starts to believe they are inferior. Puerto Ricans

have been stepped on since the fifteenth century, not knowing what sovereignty feels like for the following centuries. As a result, some Puerto Ricans believe that without the aid of the U.S. government, we could not survive. It is as Manuel Maldonado-Denis says when he quotes Frantz Fanon: "…colonialism creates in the minds of colonial peoples a sense of inferiority, a feeling of impotence and self-destruction, a desire to negate themselves by becoming more like the colonialists" (Maldonado-Denis 28). I believe Puerto Ricans assert their own "ricanness" and refrain from imitating the colonialists, but the U.S. has definitely instilled in them a sense of inferiority. Additionally, the subject of independence is rarely discussed in popular media outlets, leaving the public unaware of what a free Puerto Rico would look like. Dominant discourses that are often talked about in the media are related to the two main political parties and what they stand for: the New Progressive Party (pro-statehood) and the Popular Democratic Party (pro-commonwealth). Malavet also imagines what a sovereign Puerto Rico would look like based on the proposals from the NPP and PDP. Nevertheless, it becomes hard to imagine a free Puerto Rico. That is why it is so helpful to explore a project for reparations that could lead to a postcolonial future.

Economic Considerations

When considering postcolonial alternatives, Malavet argues that Puerto Ricans should be able to preserve their cultural identity and possess full political power, and that the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States could be altered to achieve a postcolonial solution based on what is advocated by the three main political parties. They "should be able to choose to be a national affiliation to the independent Republic of Puerto Rico, to the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico, or to the U.S. State of Puerto Rico" (Malavet 414). Notwithstanding which of the

alternatives is chosen, Malavet says that they all carry the same economic implications. The United States needs to compensate the Puerto Rican people.

> These payments are essential both for the construction of local political power for Puerto Ricans, and to create a viable Puerto Rican economy that supports real equal opportunity for puertorriqueñas y puertorriqueños, thus repairing the legacy of political, economic, and psychological colonization by the United States. (Malavet 391)

Reparations would allow Puerto Ricans to overcome the democratic deficit and exert their own political power, while providing the ability to rebuild the economy in such a way that favors them and not the United States.

Pedro A. Malavet recognizes that the term "reparations" has been more associated to the plight of African American descendants of slaves, but he wishes to expand the term to include other victims of U.S. imperialism. Since Puerto Rico has its own history of harms, injustices, and atrocities performed by the U.S., the island's unique historical and political situation requires a broader definition to appropriately craft reparation plans. Victimized groups should affirm real equality, showing "the requisite degree of harm from racism, linked to an international standard of human rights, plus a reliable estimate of damages" (Malavet 405). Reparations requires a legislative allocation of governmental resources. Unlike Darity and Mullen's program for reparations which rejects the scarcity principle (Mullen and Darity)—e.g., taking money from tax payments, or the idea that money needs to be taken from pot A and placed into pot B—Malavet indicates that the government payments would be fulfilled using general taxpayer revenues. Opposing Darity and Mullen's view, Malavet believes that the money should not be in the form of individual payments, since that would be incompatible with the basis of the claim to

reparations that is conceptualized as a group-vindication. One of their arguments in favor of individual payments rests on the fact that the Federal Reserve has vast capacity to provide the funds required for a properly designed and financed reparations program, as evidenced by the overnight transfer of $1 trillion funds during the Great Recession to investment banks (Mullen and Darity 266). Malavet, Darity, and Mullen share the same vision on the aspect of prioritizing those who have the least current wealth or income.

The defendants of reparations for ADOS set two criteria for inclusion: have at least one ancestor who was enslaved, and having self-identified as Black, Negro, or African American in any legal document for at least 12 years. Meanwhile, Malavet asserts that all island-born Puerto Ricans currently living on the island are entitled to reparations since they "constitute an identifiable cultural nation with a definable territory that is entitled to sovereignty" (Malavet 410). Basically, he says that all Puerto Ricans who are born and raised in the island should receive reparations. Although, he would also allow reparations for Boricuas born in the U.S. who migrate to the island and become citizens, after having spent more than a year in the island. Since he considers the culpable party to be the United States and the multitude of harms they have brought about, all Boricuas on the island deserve reparations since they have all been victims of the same culpable party. Let's consider the types of reparations needed for the period of American colonization and the harms recognized by Malavet.

The Construction of Sovereignty

As I wrote before, the types of reparations include the construction of sovereignty, the return of lands and monetary compensation for the occupation, information disclosure, and an apology (Malavet 412). Under the construction of sovereignty, we need to take into account the politics of legal citizenship proposed by each political party. The pro-independence movement

requires institutional reform and proposes the constitution of legal Puerto Rican citizenship acknowledged by international law. The pro-commonwealth party, which reaffirms the status Puerto Rico has held since 1952, wishes to maintain the current free associated state relationship with the U.S., with the addition of an equal relationship within the association between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Finally, those who favor statehood believe Puerto Rico should become a part of the United States as a formal state of the union, becoming total and permanent U.S. citizens with equal participation in political matters like any other U.S. citizen. In each of these options, the relationship and institutions which led to injustices need to be reformed. Any of these paths would lead to sovereignty and a postcolonial solution.

One important point that I must highlight in Malavet's article is that he maintains that the U.S. has negatively affected the path to sovereignty by remaining a colonial power for far too long. For Malavet:

> It is unconstitutional for the United States to *remain* a colonial power—a holder of territorial possessions under the U.S. Constitution—*for a period of over one hundred years*. In other words, there is a time limitation on the unfettered authority of the U.S. government pursuant to the territorial clause. (Malavet 402)

Under the constitution, the purpose of acquiring new territory should determine if the territory qualifies for admittance into the union. If the territory is unsuitable, then the occupation should come to an end. Therefore, the status of the territory should be temporary. Puerto Rico has now been a U.S. colony for one-hundred and twenty-five years, which is more than enough time for Congress to decide if the island should be incorporated as a state or granted independence. Here, reparations would redress government-sanctioned oppression by the dominant political power.

The Occupation of Vieques

Pedro A. Malavet identifies several harms and injustices done unto Puerto Ricans. These include citizenship reparations: repairing the construction of Puerto Ricans as second-class citizens, and the following effects such as the democratic deficit and the prevention of Puerto Ricans to determine their own sovereignty. Next, in land and monetary compensation, he provides two examples. First, he includes U.S. profits gained due to the fact that "nine out of ten pharmaceuticals consumed in the United States are produced in Puerto Rico, by a U.S.-controlled $27 billion industry" (Malavet 412). Second—and the one Malavet emphasizes the most—is the return of military lands to Puerto Rico. While he includes the many military bases in the island, he highlights the largest naval base of Vieques which the U.S. used as a live fire combined arms site for training. The Navy arrived to Vieques in 1941, forcibly removing thousands of residents from the coasts to the center of the island and eventually taking over two-thirds of the island (Bayne and Dieppa). Also, the use of napalm and uranium tipped weapons took a toll on the environmental landscape and the health and living conditions of the local residents. In addition, they experimented with Agent Orange before using it in Vietnam (Power and López).

I want to add some relevant facts about Vieques that are not directly addressed in Malavet's article in order to have a better understanding of the conditions of the island after its exploitation. For starters, more than the appropriation of lands, the Navy's military training used the island as their own playground with complete disregard to the locals' health. It's important to note that after a long-fought battle, the Navy finally left Vieques in 2003 and turned the land over to the United States Department of the Interior. Arturo Massol Deyá, who has conducted independent research on the island for 17 years, has analyzed "vegetation, forage samples, crabs, lagoons, and other food sources on Vieques, finding high concentrations of heavy metals

throughout the island" (Pelet). Within the Caribbean, Vieques is known to have one of the highest sickness rates. For instance, "cancer rates on the island are higher than those in any other Puerto Rican municipality" (Pelet). Also, Viequenses are seven times more susceptible to have a death related to diabetes and eight times more likely to die of cardiovascular complications than Boricuas in Puerto Rico. The U.S. government denies any connection between the use of toxic chemicals and heavy metals to the dire health conditions in Vieques. Not only are the chances of dying from the diseases mentioned above disproportionately high, but also the medical infrastructure on the island lacks the resources to deal with such a severe health situation. Vieques only has one hospital, a handful of primary doctors, and no specialists who can treat the rising number of patients who need dialysis. Perhaps the harshest truth is that there are no chemotherapy centers in Vieques, so cancer patients need to travel to Puerto Rico to receive treatment. The distance from Vieques to Puerto Rico is eighty miles, and can be traveled by ferry—which takes about four hours—or by a small aircraft—which takes about thirty minutes. The hoops that the people in Vieques have to jump through to deal with as an aftermath of the Navy's occupation are despicable.

Monetary and Psychological Redress

Returning to Malavet's views on monetary compensations, he provides another example which he identifies as the construction of a Puerto Rican economy that benefits U.S. taxpayers and investors but not Puerto Ricans. He mentions a few economic measures that benefit the U.S. and heightens inequality. One of them stems from the incorrect narrative that Puerto Ricans have "the best of both worlds" since they do not pay federal taxes whilst receiving $11 billion in federal benefits. He contests that Puerto Ricans do have to pay Social Security and FICA taxes on income. They do not, however pay federal *income* taxes. Malavet adds that "the local personal

income tax in Puerto Rico is higher than in most states, including both federal and local contributions" (Malavet 411). He also highlights that the U.S. is not being generous when they offer aid to Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans *are* U.S. citizens, so the U.S. is simply fulfilling its duties to fellow U.S. citizens. Puerto Ricans in the island also receive federal benefits at a lower rate than those who live in the States as well as high local taxes. In addition, compared to the national U.S. average, Boricuas have less than one-third of the mean per capita income. In the year 2021, the median household income was $21,967 according to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (Census). During that same year, the percent of people in poverty was 40.5% (Census).

For psychological reparations, Malavet proposes that perhaps the crisis of self-confidence perpetrated by the U.S. has been the biggest harm. As I mentioned before, the U.S. creates detrimental narratives of Puerto Rican "otherness" which leads to internalized oppression. This affects the Puerto Rican's self-view and leads them to conclude that they lack the capacity for making their own governmental decisions. Evidently, this is exacerbated by the democratic deficit. The United States needs to disclose the political repression it has engaged in where they incriminated those who were deemed too subversive. More importantly, the U.S. government needs to fully divulge the benefits that it has received from Puerto Rico during the 125 years of colonization. Finally, after acknowledging their part in the injustices and harms they created, Puerto Ricans deserve a proper apology from the United States.

Hurricane María

I think Pedro A. Malavet's preliminary reparations framework serves as the foundation on which additional work could be done. I believe that there are more acts perpetrated by the U.S. that makes them the culpable party responsible for owing reparations to Puerto Ricans,

which will be discussed later. In a conversation with Professor Darity, he mentioned there are two approaches that can be taken when considering how to determine the act of restitution in reparations. One of them is identifying some sort of measure which accounts for the magnitude of the disparity between the culpable party and the victims. This is what Dr. Darity and Dr. Mullen propose with the racial wealth gap between white and Black people today, since it is a tool that can be used as a summary measure of the cumulative economic effects across generations after slavery. The other approach is to try to enumerate all the specific ways in which the culpable party has committed injustices or has benefited from the victims[8] (Darity). This is the method Malavet uses and the one I will deploy. I will analyze several events that have led to damages and harms that have been imposed on Puerto Rico. Evidently, what I will propose is nowhere near a comprehensive list. There will be many missing atrocities and data, but hopefully it will spark a conversation and invite others to think about these questions.

In addition to the events identified by Malavet, I want to add those which I discussed in the previous chapter: the 1900s Foraker Law, the 1920 Maritime Merchant Act, the 1937 Ponce massacre, and the 1955 birth control experiments. In an oversimplification of these events, we can say that the Foraker Law, by declaring Puerto Ricans as second-class citizens and Puerto Rico as a territory, was used by the U.S. government as an excuse to treat Puerto Ricans and all matters in Puerto Rico in whatever way they wanted. The Maritime Merchant Act created economic growth for the States at the expense of Puerto Ricans, and it does so until today. The Ponce massacre was a government-sanctioned slaughter which affected the lives of hundreds of innocent people. The birth control experiments reduced women to their bodies in such a way that it led to sickness and death of Puerto Rican women without their knowledge. None of these

[8] Darity, William. Conversation. 17 March 2023.

events have been redressed. The U.S. has not acknowledged nor admitted culpability, much less recognized that they must provide restitution.

I wish to add one more item to the list, specifically the differential response to natural disasters, exemplified by the U.S. response to Hurricane María. I was still in the island when the ravage occurred. I lived through dozens of hurricanes and tropical storms before and the aftermath had never been catastrophic, so I had a certain nonchalance regarding this one. I had never heard such violent winds. It was 4:00AM, and it seemed as if the wind was punishing us. "Maria made landfall as a category 4 hurricane with sustained winds of 155 miles per hour" (Cortés 1). The movement of the water in our pool felt like a pile of books that someone held up above their head and then dropped them down with force. Keeping in mind my experience with past hurricanes, for the first time I was scared to open my window. I quickly went to my parents' room, where the rest of my family was huddled. As the sun began to rise and we had a glimpse of the wreckage, we were shocked to see how almost every tree had been obliterated. The landscape went from looking like a mountainous malachite green to a dreadful brown. As Ricky Martin in an interview with Ellen Degeneres said: "It looks like they nuked us" (Kreps). My father had a garden and a farm where nothing could be salvaged. The water came in through the main doors until the entire living room was flooded. It took weeks before we got the power and water back on. However, my experience was nowhere near what most Puerto Ricans experienced since many had their entire homes fall apart. It was an unprecedented crisis lived by all Puerto Ricans, for which we barely had any resources to surmount.

The final estimated death toll confirmed in the summer of 2018 in a study conducted by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health/Beth Israel Deaconness Medical Center was of at least 4,645 (Kishore et al. 162). And yet, Ed Morales noted that when the U.S. President Donald

Trump visited the island a few days after the hurricane, he "bullied the governor into admitting that there were only four casualties of the hurricane when in fact the bodies were already pilling up at the morgue and, for those less fortunate, in people's backyards" (Morales 201). The President minimized the number of deaths so he could justify not sending more relief funds. In relation to the deaths, I remember a horrifying story. During the floods of the hurricane, a poor family had to use a rope to tie a loved one's body to a column in their house so that it would not get washed away. There are plenty more unheard stories like these, and while 4,645 sounds like an accurate number, we may never really know how many people died in the aftermath of the hurricane. When the U.S. President said that there were barely any casualties, the pro-statehood ex-governor Ricardo Rosselló did not try to correct him since he wanted to be in Donald Trump's favor. One of the excuses he gave for not sending more aid was that "[Puerto Rico] is an island surrounded by water, big water, ocean water" (Holpuch and Smith). During his visit, he also made light of the situation by throwing papel towels to the victims as if he was practicing his basketball free throws.

The U.S. Federal Government's response was marked by "unnecessary delays, silence, and the withholding of information, and the prioritization of bureaucracy" (Robinson et al.). Hurricane María really brought to the surface how the island was like a Jenga tower that was one move away from crumbling. An audit conducted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security found that the distribution of commodities by FEMA was mismanaged. The results of the audit are the following:

> FEMA lost visibility of about 38 percent of its commodity shipments to Puerto Rico, worth an estimated $257 million. Commodities successfully delivered to Puerto Rico took an average of 69 days to reach their final destinations. Inadequate FEMA contractor

> oversight contributed to the lost visibility and delayed commodity shipments. FEMA did not use its Global Positioning System transponders to track commodity shipments, allowed the contractor to break inventory seals, and did not ensure documented proof of commodity deliveries. (DHS)

This is just a glimpse of the ways in which Puerto Rico endured neglect which resulted in the death of thousands. The Maritime Merchant Act reared its ugly head here too, preventing much-needed supplies from non-U.S. ships to enter. Who knows how many lives could have been saved had it not been for the systematic denial of goods like water, food, and medication? It is as Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol Lebrón write in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, we know that the reason why the majority of those who perished did so was because of the structural failures that followed (Bonilla and LeBrón). Puerto Ricans became once again, as we saw with the Spanish colonization period, a people without sovereignty at the hands of colonial powers who are able to decide who lives and who dies.

Finding Stillness

In this project, I have considered only six events which harmed Puerto Rico and benefited the U.S. during the period of one-hundred and twenty-five years. The complete itemization of specific harms, injustices, and atrocities constitutes a major challenge since it would require identifying every single injustice, assigning a value to each, and then calculating the sum for a reparations bill. Here, I have expanded on the work of Pedro A. Malavet by suggesting more events to add to the ones he considers worthy of reparations. As he looks forward into postcolonial futures, he considers the political strategies of the three main political parties in Puerto Rico as possible paths. In this case I consider the pro-statehood and pro-independence parties. Each case requires its own reparations claim. The argument becomes a claim for either

citizenship or sovereignty. Like Malavet, I support the sovereignty claim. In our path towards independence, the funds provided through reparations would ease the transition and provide much-needed acknowledgement as well. Puerto Ricans should be able to decide their future, without having restrictions imposed from the outside. We should have the capacity for self-government. Justice needs to become the priority.

Some might ask: If these events happened in the past, why ask for reparations now? Like scholars Marisol Lebrón and Yarimar Bonilla suggest, "Puerto Ricans are experiencing the 'aftershocks of disaster' as they are endlessly jolted by a series of disasters that seem to compound one another and make life more uncertain and insecure" (LeBrón and Llenín-Figueroa). For example, the effects of the pre-existing measures like the cabotage laws are compounded by the United States' neglect after Hurricane María. I'd like to add that Puerto Rico is currently subordinated to the U.S. imposed Fiscal Control Board, which oversees the island's finances. The Fiscal Control Board has authority over Puerto Rico's government and the power to apply austerity measures. Right now, there is no "before" and "after" colonialism. In her fundamental work *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe talks about a past that is not yet past. She uses the concept of "the wake" to emphasize Blackness, Black death, and the resistance of that death in a climate which calls for a reckoning with the ongoing oppression endured by Black people. The wake framework she engenders could also be used to describe the Puerto Rican colonial condition. We are caught in the wake of colonialism. The aftershocks are continuous. Through reparations, perhaps we can start navigating towards a moment in which we can all stand still.

Conclusion

In this project, I have identified the origins of inequality in Puerto Rico within the Spanish colonization. The matrix of otherness, slavery, and forced whiteness are some of the ways in which the Spanish dominated Puerto Ricans. Enslaved people and civilians tried to subvert the colonial powers through revolts. I highlight the lives and works of Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luisa Capetillo, and Julia de Burgos, who rebelled against the smothering governments and traditional gender roles. Through their songs, prose, poetry, and life choices, they contributed to the creation of the tradition of resistance in Puerto Rico. The United States colonization brought new challenges: the imposition of a legal status of second-class citizens to all Puerto Ricans, the official declaration of Puerto Rico as property of the United States, and setting up the island infrastructure as a way for gaining land and yielding monetary benefits. These are just a few ways in which the skyscraper of inequality kept reaching higher to the clouds.

As I looked into the ways in which the U.S. directly benefited from Puerto Rico or heightened inequality, I underscored six main events: The Foraker Law, the Maritime Merchant Act, the Ponce massacre, the birth control experiments, the occupation of Vieques, and Hurricane María. Individually, these events might seem like an exception to the norm. When looking at them together, we realize how the U.S. has a pattern of subjugating the Puerto Rican people. To account for these injustices and those not mentioned in this project, I make a case for reparations. The types of reparations needed would include the construction of sovereignty, the return of property and monetary compensation for the occupation, information disclosure, and apology. Reparations would allow the construction of political power and the creation of a viable economy as we take a step towards a postcolonial future. Future research can consider more ways in which the U.S. has benefited from the island to create a more complete list of harms. It

would also be productive to include Spain as a culpable party and fashion a framework for reparations based on their unjust treatment of Boricuas. These steps would be just the beginning of a plan in which Puerto Rico can finally achieve justice.

Works Cited

"History." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. n.d. <www.britannica.com/place/Puerto-Rico/History>.

"Taino." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. n.d. 3 <https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Taino>.

Acosta-Belén, Edna. *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society*. Praeger, 1986.

Acosta-Lespier, Ivonne. "The Smith Act Goes to San Juan." Bosque-Pérez, Ramón and Colón Morera, José Javier. *Puerto Rico under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*. Albany: State of University of New York Press, 2006. 59.

Alegría Ricardo E., and Rivera Quiñones Eladio. *Historia y cultura De Puerto Rico: desde la época pre-colombina hasta nuestros días*. San Juan: Fundación Francisco Carvajal, 1999.

Ayala, César J., and Bernabe, Rafael. *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

B., Ramírez de Arellano, Anette. *Colonialism, Catholicism and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1983.

Baralt, Guillermo A. *Slave Revolts in Puerto Rico: Conspiracies and Uprisings, 1795-1873*. Markus Wiener, 2015.

Bayne, Martha and Dieppa, Isabel Sophia. *Puerto Rico's Vieques Island Ousted the US Navy. Now the Fight's Against Airbnb*. 16 July 2019. 22 February 2023. <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-07-16/puerto-rico-s-vieques-island-ousted-us-navy-now-fight-s-against-airbnb>.

Bonilla, Yarimar, LeBrón Marisol, and Quiñones Díaz Arcadio. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*. Chicago: Haymarket books, 2019.

Bureau, United States Census. *QuickFacts Puerto Rico*. n.d. March 2023. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/PR/INC110221>.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (n.d.): 519.

Cabranes, José A. "Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the United States Citizenship of Puerto Ricans." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 127.2 (1978): 391-492.

Capetillo, Luisa, and Lara Walker. *Absolute Equality: An Early Feminist Perspective*. Arte Publico Press, 2009.

Capetillo, Luisa, and V. Matos Rodríguez Félix. *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out*. Arte Público Press, 2004.

Christenson, M. *Puerto Rico Census 2000 Responses to the Race and Ethnicity Questions*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." June 2014. *The Atlantic.* 25 March 2023. <www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

Cortés, Jason. "Puerto Rico: Hurricane Maria and the Promise of Disposability." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 29.3 (2018): 1-8.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989).

Cuffari, Joseph V. *FEMA Mismanaged the Commodity Distribution Process in Response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria*. Office of Inspector General. DC, 2020.

Darity, William "Sandy". "A Blueprint for Reparations in the US." June 2020. *TED.* 6 February 2023.

Darity, William A., Mullen, A. Kirsten. *From Here To Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*. NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

Denis, Nelson A. *War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony*. New York: Bold Type Books, 2015.

"'This Is Our Time': Mayra Santos-Febres on Changing Narratives About Race Across the Americas." n.d. *The Latinx Project at NYU.* 25 January 2023. <www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/intervenxions/mayra-santos-febres-on-changing-narratives-about-race-and-social-equity-across-the-americas>.

Falcón, Angelo. "Colonial Reparations for Puerto Rico: A Framework for a Postcolonial Transition." *Latino Studies* 16.4 (2018): 559-562.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1968.

Figueroa, Luis A. *Gale-Force Winds of 1868-1873: Tearing down Slavery, The Chapter 4." Sugar, Slavery, & Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Frittelli, John. *Shipping Under the Jones Act: Legislative and Regulatory Background*. 21 November 2019. 4 March 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45725>.

Godreau, Isar P. *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. University of California Press, 2019.

Gonzalez, Juan, and Garcia-Passalacqua, Juan M. *Remembering Puerto Rico's Ponce Massacre* Amy Goodman. 22 March 2007.

Grennes, Thomas. "The Jones Act Revisited." 20 December 2017. *Mercatus.org.* 4 March 2023. <https://www.mercatus.org/research/policy-briefs/jones-act-revisited>.

Grimes, Katie. "Breaking the Body of Christ: The Sacraments of Initiation in a Habitat of White Supremacy." *Political Theology* 18.1 (2016): 24. doi.org/10.1179/1743171915y.0000000005.

Guzman, Timothy Alexander. "Racism and 'Dreams of Extermination' in Puerto Rico: U.S. Biological Warfare and the Legacy of Dr. Cornelius Rhoades." *Global Research* (2020).

Harding, Sandra. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. Routledge, 2004.

Haslip-Viera, Gabriel, et al. *White Latino Privilege: Caribbean Latino Perspectives in the Second Decade of the 21st Century*. Latino Studies Press, 2018.

Hernández-Díaz, Arleen. *Labor-Management Relations in Puerto Rico during the Twentieth Century*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.

Iñigo, Abbad y Lasierra. "Historia Geográfica, Civil y Natural De La Isla De San Juan Bautista De Puerto-Rico." 1866. *Library of Congress.* Impr. y librería De Acosta. <www.loc.gov/item/03006061/>.

Jennings, Willie. *Racism: The History of the Problem with Rev. Dr. Willie Jennings*. July 2020. Vimeo.

Kishore, Nishant, et al. "Mortality in Puerto Rico After Hurricane Maria." *New England Journal of Medicine* 379.2 (2018): 162-170.

Kreps, Daniel. *It Looks Like They Nuked Us*. 6 October 2017. 22 March 2023. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ricky-martin-on-puerto-rico-it-looks-like-they-nuked-us-116206/>.

LeBrón Marisol, and Llenín-Figueroa Beatriz. *Against Muerto Rico: Lessons From the Verano Boricua*. Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente Inc., 2021.

LeBrón, Marisol. "Policing 'Coraje' in the Colony: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Politics of Rage in Puerto Rico." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 46.4 (2021): 801-826.

Lincicome, Scott. *The American-Made Boot on Puerto Rico's Neck*. 28 September 2022. 4 March 2023. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/american-made-boot-puerto-ricos-neck>.

López, José. *Independence Is the Progressive Solution to US Colonialism in Puerto Rico* Margaret Power. 23 January 2021.

Malavet, Pedro A. "Reparations Theory and Postcolonial Puerto Rico: Some Preliminary Thoughts." *Berkeley La Raza* (2002): 387–423.

Maldonado-Denis, Manuel. "The Puerto Ricans: Protest or Submission?" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political Social Science* (1969): 25-31.

Marrero-Rosado, José L. "Taínos & Caribbean Indigenous Peoples." n.d. *Berkeley ORIAS.* 4 January 2023. <https://orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/societies-americas/ta%C3%ADnos-caribbean-indigenous-peoples>.

Matos-Rodríguez, Félix, and Linda Delgado. *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*. Taylor and Francis, 2015.

Mayone Stycos, J. "Female Sterilization in Puerto Rico." *Eugenics Quarterly* 1.2 (1954): 3-9.

Mbembé, J.-A. and Libby Meintjes. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.

Meaning, Reparations Definition &. *Merriam-Webster*. n.d. 10 February 2023.

Meléndez-Badillo, Jorell. *Páginas Libres: Breve Antología Del Pensamiento Anarquista En Puerto Rico*. Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente, 2021.

Mignolo, Walter D. "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience." *Postcolonial Studies* 14.3 (2011): 273-283. doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105.

Nelson, C., and L. Grossberg. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan Education, 1988.

Pelet, Valeria. *Puerto Rico's Invisible Health Crisis*. 3 September 2016. Atlantic Media Company. 23 February 2023. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/>.

Pendergrass, Drew C., and Michelle Y. Raji. "The Bitter Pill: Harvard and The Dark History of Birth Control." 28 September 2017. *Magazine | The Harvard Crimson.* 8 March 2023.

Picó, Fernando. *History of Puerto Rico: A Panorama of Its People*. Markus Wiener Publishers, 2017.

"Puerto Rico". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. n.d. 21 December 2022.
—. *Genocide Studies Program*. 1 January 1970. 3 January 2023. <gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/colonial-genocides-project/puerto-rico>.

Ramos, Julio. *Amor y anarquía: Escritos de Luisa Capetillo*. Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente, 2021.

René Ramos, Lucas. "Borinqueña Blanca [White Native]: A Racialized Revisiting of Puerto Rican Independence through the Life of Lola Rodríguez De Tió, 1850-1900." *Tortoise: A Journal of Writing Pedagogy* (2019).

Robinson, Stacy-ann, Andrea Vega Troncoso, J. Timmons Roberts, and Matilda Peck. "'We Are a People': Sovereignty and Disposability in the Context of Puerto Rico's Post-Hurricane Maria Experience." *The Geographical Journal* (2022).

Roman, Ediberto. "Empire Forgotten: The United States's Colonization of Puerto Rico." *Villanova Law Review* (1997): 1119-1212.

Santiago, Roberto. *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings: An Anthology*. One World, 1995.

Springfield, Consuelo López. "'I Am the Life, the Strength, the Woman': Feminism in Julia De Burgos' Autobiographical Poetry." *Callaloo* 17.3 (n.d.): 701-714.

Stark, David Martin. *Slave Families and the Hato Economy in Puerto Rico*. University Press of Florida, 2017.

Stephens, Miari Taina. "Black Feminist Organizing and Caribbean Cyberfeminisms in Puerto Rico." *Open Cultural Studies* 6.1 (2022): 147-166.

Suárez Findlay, Eileen. *Imposing Decency the Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Suarez-Pottsm, Jamie and Lorenzo Rossello. "The Making of a Puerto Rican Revolutionary." *Peacework* (1998).

Tió, Elsa. "Lola Rodríguez De Tió: Del Otro Lado De La Palabra." *Archipiélago: Revista Cultural De Nuestra América* 2014.

University, Yale. *Yale University Genocide Studies Program*. n.d. 23 December 2022.

Vézina, Valérie. "Puerto Rico: The Quest for a National Anthem." 7 September 2017. 15 March 2023. <www.shimajournal.org/issues/v11n2/o.-Vezina-Shima-v11n2.pdf>.

Villanueva, Victor. "Colonial Memory and the Crime of Rhetoric: Pedro Albizu Campos." July 2009. *JSTOR.* 7 March 2023. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25653000>.

Williams, Patrick, Laura Chrisman, and Gayatri Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (1994): 66-111.

Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257-337.