IN TIMES OF "CRISIS":
PUERTO RICAN ACTIVISM, GENDER, AND BELONGING IN ORLANDO

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In Times of "Crisis" is an ethnography of Puerto Rican activism in the Orlando metropolitan area that directly addresses contemporary events or moments of "crisis," such as the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico, the shooting at Pulse nightclub, the 2016 U.S. elections, and Hurricane Maria. Based on 24 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2016 and 2018, this dissertation asks and answers the following questions: What does the concept of crisis obscure and what knowledges does it make visible? How do Puerto Rican activists respond to these so-called "crises" in their own lives and communities? And how have conditions in Puerto Rico shaped activism in the diaspora to Orlando? Ultimately, this study of Puerto Rican activism argues for an understanding of the concept of crisis that does not denote exception, but rather continuities of social injustices across transnational spheres. This understanding also considers the ways that crisis is generative, producing alternative imaginings of a more just world and transnational spaces of belonging forged out of resistance.

The first full-length ethnographic study of Puerto Rican activism in Central Florida, this dissertation departs from traditional studies of social activism by examining how crisis and activism are interconnected across the borders of the nation-state. In the process, it demonstrates how the socio-economic and political climate in Puerto Rico has led to the crystallization of a particularly local Puerto Rican activist community in Orlando that imagines itself as part of a larger transnational Puerto Rican community. Further, by foregrounding the narratives of Puerto Rican women this work is positioned within a genealogy of women of color feminisms that attends to how marginalized populations interpret and contest intersecting forms of oppression.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

> Why am I compelled to write? Because writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you.
>
> - Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers"

For as long as I can remember, I have felt compelled to write – from the poetry and short stories I would sell for pennies to my family in our apartment in the South Bronx, to the countless pages written throughout graduate school. I am an anthropologist, but I am also a writer. I know that I would not have been able to write this work without the support of several people – some for whom I write and many of whom have kept the spirit of writing in me alive.

Throughout my time at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I have been fortunate to learn from a number of scholars who have not only challenged me to think more critically, but who have also provided me with guidance, encouragement, and support. My advisor and chair of my dissertation committee, Alejandro Lugo, has been central to my intellectual and professional growth as a scholar. Thank you for imparting on me your expertise and knowledge, for your extensive and thoughtful feedback on my work, and for your belief in me and my research. Your devotion to training and mentoring students is truly a gift. Thank you to my proposal and dissertation committee. Martin Manalansan, I am immensely grateful for

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The pursuit of my doctoral degree has led to many missed birthdays, brunches, and other get-togethers with my dear family and friends. To my "girls of Mount St. Ursula," Sandana Raj, Patrice Mitchell, and Tracy Paul – thank you for always being there, despite the distance, and for making our sporadic reunions seem like I was never absent for too long.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IN FLORIDA

> Doubtless, the lived experience of what is deemed "crisis" cannot be reduced to a statistical event or an ensemble of socioeconomic indicators. Such representations disregard the ways in which crisis becomes a device for understanding how to act effectively in situations that belie, for the actors, a sense of possibility. But still we must ask, if crisis designates something more than a socioeconomic indicator or a historical conjuncture,
> what is the status of that term?
>
> - Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*

> Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming.
>
> - Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*

I arrived in Orlando at a critical juncture. It was 2016, an election year in which the public fascination with the "Latino Vote" was palpable. It was a period marked by more than a $73 billion debt that came at the cost of austerity and insecurity that crossed borders from Puerto Rico to the Orlando metropolitan area in ways that I did not yet fully comprehend. It was also the year a gunman opened fire at Pulse, a gay nightclub I had frequently passed, altering the atmosphere of the city. And just when I decided I was "done" with fieldwork, Hurricane Maria

swept through the Caribbean, its "aftershocks" (Bonilla and LeBrón 2019) felt from Puerto Rico to the United States.

The discourse of crisis was pervasive. While touring Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, Florida Senator Marco Rubio told reporters at a press conference in San Juan, "These aren't normal times. This is a crisis" (Nielson 2017). But even before Maria, popular media outlets had declared Puerto Rico "in crisis" (Gamboa 2015; Leonhardt 2017; Newkirk II 2017). A debt crisis, a healthcare crisis, disaster as crisis, a crisis of migration – Puerto Rico is a microcosm of a "world geography" of crisis that includes places like Afghanistan, Gaza, and Iraq (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). It appears that all is in crisis. But what exactly does it mean to *be* in crisis?

One of my interlocutors, Monica, recalled a meeting she attended with about twenty other community leaders and politicians in the wake of Hurricane Maria.[1] After listening to others discuss the needs and challenges facing recent evacuees to Orlando, Monica took her turn to speak, saying, "Everybody keeps on calling this a crisis because 10,000 Puerto Ricans came in the last three days. But what happened to the 89,000 that came to the U.S. last year and the 56,000 that came in 2015 and the 42,000 that came in 2014. And we can keep on going. It's been hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans who have come to the mainland. So everyone's worried about the housing crisis, about the crisis in schools now because they don't have the capacity, and all these things. But the crisis has been a crisis all along."

Monica's assessment that "the crisis has been a crisis all along" played over and over in my head as I sorted through the hundreds of hours of audio recordings and pages of notes in my field notebooks. It prompted me to ask: Is crisis about duration or rupture? On the one hand, this

[1] All names are pseudonyms, except in the case of politicians or other public figures.

dissertation is a response to the public fascination with crisis. In her book *Anti-Crisis*, Janet Roitman (2014) takes the reader on a journey through the conceptual history of the term crisis, in order to understand its discursive work. Crisis is oftentimes framed in terms of "the real" and the "departure from the real" (Roitman 2013, 46), as a breakdown in normalcy or a "state of exception" (Agamben 2005). It also captures something of temporality. In his well-known essay on crisis, Koselleck (2006) maps the different narrative constructions of crisis throughout history. He maintains that, since the late eighteenth century, crisis represents an "epochal concept" that denotes transition from the past to an uncertain future (Koselleck 2006, 371).

Rather than provide a clear definition of the term, Roitman (2013) positions crisis as a "blind spot" that makes certain knowledges visible, while foreclosing others (39). Drawing on these conceptualizations of crisis, as well as events that are oftentimes framed as crises in the public imaginary as a point of departure, I ask the questions: What does the concept of crisis obscure and what knowledges does it make visible? And how do Puerto Ricans, particularly women, living in Orlando respond to these so-called crises in their own lives and communities? Through an ethnographic examination of crisis, I argue that the fixation on crisis does little more than conceal longstanding inequalities, such as iterations of colonialism and second-class citizenship, across transnational spaces. If we position crisis as an extension of such injustices, then it is not exceptional at all, and yet it still has the power to generate possibilities as people begin to imagine alternatives.

More than an ethnography of crisis, this dissertation is about what happens when complacency is not enough. It is an anthropology of protest, of organizations, about durations and ruptures, and about belonging across borders. It is about the emergence of a Puerto Rican

activist community in Orlando that imagines itself as part of a larger transnational Puerto Rican community.

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In anthropology, scholars have used events as a framework to understand historical and contemporary cultural phenomena. Manchester anthropologists were concerned with the "atypicality of the events…, most especially those that expressed conflict and crisis or threw into relief the social and political tensions that were conceived as being at the heart of everyday life" (Kapferer 2015, 2). For instance, in "An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand," Gluckman (1940) argued that events or social situations point to "the underlying system of relationships between the social structure of the community, the parts of the social structure, the physical environment, and the physiological life of the community's members" (10). In these representations, events are disruptive happenings that illustrate aspects of social life or social systems. Others, like Geertz (1973), foregrounded events, such as the Balinese cockfight, to illustrate "thick description" and the interpretive role of the anthropologist to peel back the layers of cultural meanings with which they are imbued.

But analyses of events have also facilitated a movement beyond dichotomies. For instance, in *Islands of History*, Sahlins (1985) considers the relationship between structure and agency through an analysis of key events in Polynesian history, such as the killing of Captain James Cook. The "structure of the conjuncture," according to Sahlins, is "a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context" (Sahlins 1985, 125). As such, he argues that if we are to understand events or structures, then we must also understand the intentions of individuals. Sahlin's

positioning of culture as both lived and as constituted presents a dialectic that allows for a careful analysis of each category and their relation to each other (Lugo 2008, 1990).

Renato Rosaldo (1993) similarly moves beyond dichotomies, drawing on the concept of chaos, which like crisis, suggests images of the breakdown of society or a departure from normalcy. Engaging with Durkheim's theory of violence, he posits that "social analysis succeeds in using suggestive innuendo to invoke the nightmare vision because of its resonance with current political rhetoric. In such contexts, the vision of chaos appears more as a trope for use in debate (an only half-revealed that of "what would happen if…) than as a subject for analysis" (100). Instead, Rosaldo (1993) proposes that "social analysis should look beyond the dichotomy of order versus chaos towards the less explored realm of non-order" (102). Such a move shifts attention away from this "nightmare vision" and towards the agency of social actors in an unpredictable and changing world.

In this dissertation, I turn towards the "border zones" of crisis and non-crisis, simultaneously examining both the everydayness of crisis, as well as how crisis is produced and reproduced through structures, such as colonialism and neoliberalism as an extension of colonialism. I purport that such an approach is essential to the understanding of crisis and the emergence of activism in Central Florida. In order to do so, I examine four events, in particular, that occurred during my fieldwork period: the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico (Chapter 2), which began long before I embarked on this research; the 2016 local and national elections (Chapter 3), the shooting at Pulse nightclub (Chapter 4), and Hurricane Maria (Chapter 5). The following timeline (Figure 1) serves as a point of reference for the ethnographic chapters that make up this body of work.

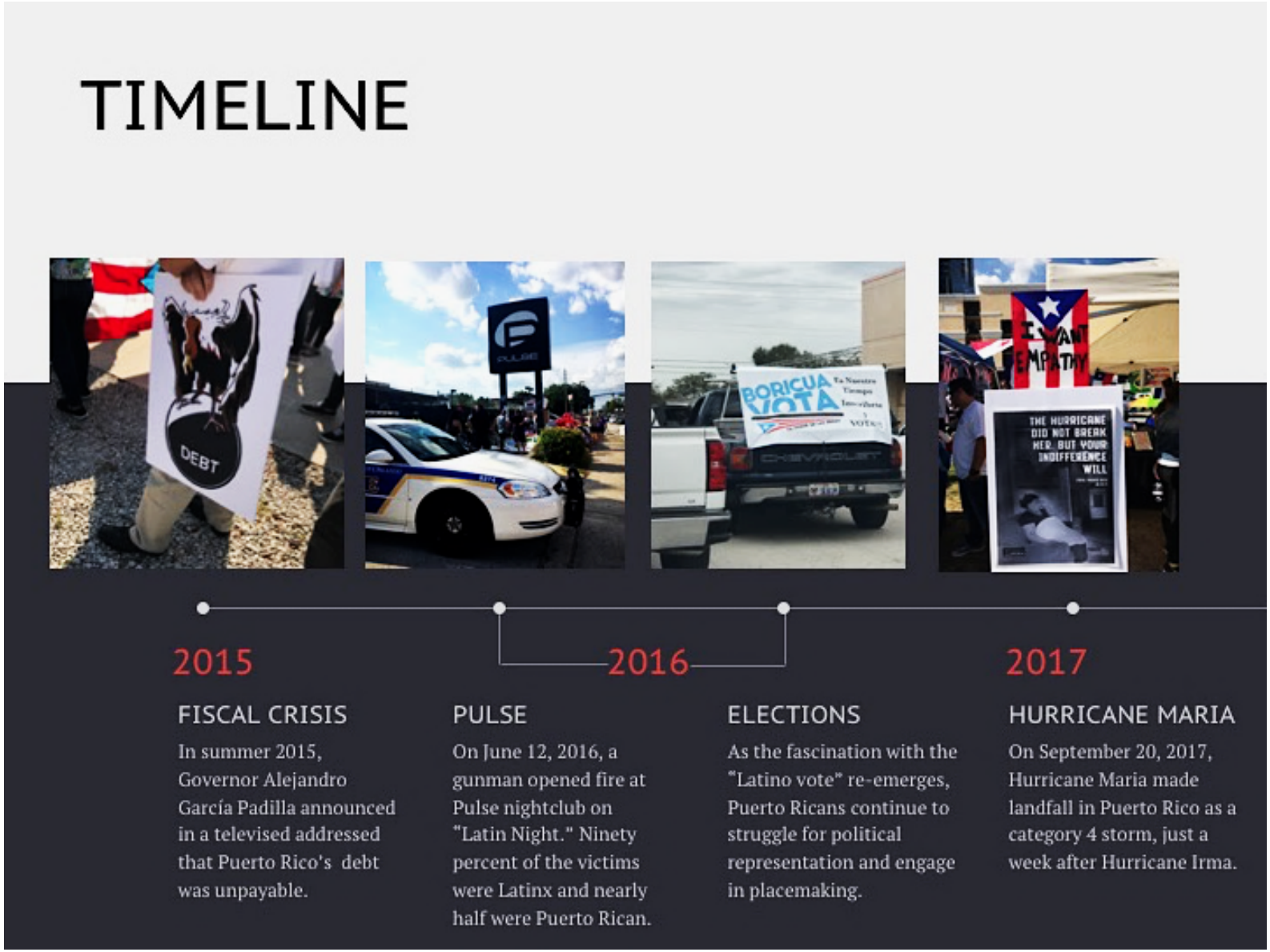

Figure 1: Timeline of events. Photos by author 2016-2017.

Navigating the "*Nuevo South*"

> You know, we don't need a lot more anthropologists in the state. It's a great degree if people want to get it, but we don't need them here.
>
> - Rick Scott, Interview with the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

> I've got the map of Florida on my tongue.
>
> - Zora Neal Hurston

As I drive down the street, I pass the signs of neighborhood businesses written in Spanish and hear the beat of salsa music playing in a nearby car. I see the flags of various Latin American countries billowing in the balmy breeze outside a used car dealership. I sense what is often referred to as the "Latinization" of the region. But it was not always so, as I am told by long-time residents. There was a time when Spanish was seldom heard in public spaces and coming across another Puerto Rican at a local Walmart was cause for excitement.

As Brenda, who we meet later in Chapter 3, recalled upon moving to Orlando in 1995, "The Puerto Rican piece when I got here, we had some but to me it felt more underground it wasn't like out." She continued, "Now you go, the *caravanas* (caravans) are here, you go to the Puerto Rican restaurants. There was a good amount of Puerto Ricans here, but it wasn't the same."

Today, there are over 5 million Puerto Ricans in the United States, an estimated 1.2 million of which reside in the state of Florida. In what follows, I briefly contextualize the

Figure 2: El Jibarito Restaurant in Kissimmee, one of the many Puerto Rican businesses in the Orlando metropolitan area.

migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States and Florida, more specifically, in order to paint a picture of the historical, geographic, and demographic landscape of the region.

Since the imposition of U.S. colonial rule in 1898, Puerto Rican migration to the United States has been facilitated by a number of factors, including recruitment for contract labor, as well as changes in the archipelago's economy (see Whalen 2005; Sanchez-Korrol 1983). Following the imposition of U.S. citizenship in 1917, migration to the United States steadily increased. By 1930, there were 52,774 living in the United States, a number which grew exponentially to 301,375 by 1950 (Sanchez-Korrol/CENTRO). The post-World War II period commonly known as the Great Migration, saw a decline in agricultural labor on the archipelago and a push towards contracted factory labor in U.S. cities (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 2006; Whalen 2005). While there is a rich body of literature documenting this migration and the

experiences of Puerto Ricans in traditional diasporic locations in parts of the Northeast and Midwest (Fernandez 2012; Pérez 2004; Ramos-Zayas 2003; Rúa 2012; Thomas 2012; Whalen 2001), until recently, less attention has been paid to the migration of Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs to the U.S. South.[2]

The migration of Latinxs to the South has led some scholars to refer to the region and its changing demographic landscape as the "New South." While the coining of the term is attributed to Henry Grady, an Atlanta editor who used the expression in an effort to attract white northerners to the south during the 1880s and 1890s, it has since been ascribed to describe the narrative of Latinx migration to the region (Weise 2012). However, the term is somewhat of a misnomer, since the presence of Latinxs in the South is not at all a new phenomenon (Rodriguez 2012; Weise 2012). As Weise (2012) contends, "The South's long history of proclaiming 'New'-ness as a strategy towards historical amnesia should give us pause before adopting such a refrain" (54). Therefore, I move against the adoption of an ahistorical approach to the study of Latinxs in the South and, in particular, Puerto Ricans in Florida.

According to Rodriguez (2012), the earliest migrations of Latinxs to the Deep South began in the early twentieth century and included Mexican laborers who were recruited for the lumber and cotton fields of Mississippi. In New Orleans, Mexican labor migrants, as well as members of the Latin American business elite, arrived via the commercial gateway port. The Great Migration of the 1920s, which brought Black migrants up to the North, also increased the

[2] There has been much scholarly debate over the use of Hispanic, Latino/a, Latin@, and Latinx, and other identifiers (Oboler 1995; Guidotti-Hernández 2017; Rodríguez 2017). Throughout this dissertation I use Latinx generally as a means of gender inclusivity, except when discussing "official" categories of statistical analysis, like the U.S. Census. However, when known, I use the identifiers preferred by my participants.

demand for Latinx workers in the cotton fields of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Moreover, in the U.S. Southwest, Latinxs were sought after to replace Chinese railroad workers. Federal labor programs, such as the Bracero Program of 1942, also led to an increase in Mexican migration to the Southwest and some parts of the Southeast (Rodriguez 2012). In the decades that followed, the growth of industries such as poultry farming, meatpacking, carpet manufacturing, construction, and service led to the recruitment of Latinxs to various parts of the South.[3]

Rank	State	Total Inflow	Share (in %)
1	Florida	242,134	29
2	New York	79,985	9.6
3	Pennsylvania	68,727	8.2
4	Texas	58,723	7.0
5	Massachusetts	50,231	6.0
6	New Jersey	44,360	5.3
7	Connecticut	29,809	3.6
8	Ohio	23,639	2.8
9	Georgia	22,438	2.7
10	California	20,555	2.5

Table 1: Top 10 Destination States for Migrants from Puerto Rico to the United States, 2005–2016. Source: https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/population/website-article/growth-puerto-rican-population-florida-and-us-mainland

[3] See the 2012 special issue, "Latino/as in the South," in the *Latino Studies* journal for a more in-depth history of these migrations.

Florida does not always come to mind when we think of the South, perhaps, in part, due to the imaginary created by the Disneyfication of the state as the "happiest place on earth."[4] As seen in Table 1, between the period of 2005-2016, Florida's inflow from Puerto Rico (29%) to the United States exceeded that of other U.S. states.[5] But Puerto Ricans have been settling in the state since the early twentieth century, when they were recruited for positions in the agriculture, factory, and garment industries, as well as the cigar-making industry in Tampa (Duany and Matos-Rodriguez 2006). There were other push-and-pull factors that contributed to the historical and contemporary migration of Puerto Ricans to the region. As early as the 1940s, military recruitment brought Puerto Ricans to Florida and, in the mid-1970s, Puerto Rican engineers were recruited from the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez campus by NASA (Silver 2010). Orlando, in particular, experienced a surge in migration from Puerto Rico with the opening of Walt Disney's theme park, in 1971, which brought jobs and increased real estate speculation in the area (Delerme 2014). By 1980, the Puerto Rican population in Florida had increased to over 90,000, up from 28,166 in 1970 (as cited in Duany and Silver 2010).

Today, events such as the economic crisis and Hurricane Maria contribute to the population loss of the archipelago, which is arguably experiencing the largest exodus of its

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[4] Like many parts of the South and the continental U.S., Florida has a long history of racial violence and Jim Crow segregation (Greenbaum 2002), including the title of the highest per capita lynching rate of all the former confederate states (Tolnay and Beck 1995). However, I heed the caution of Lassiter and Crespino (2010) who argue against a "framework of Southern exceptionalism" (7). Therefore, while I make note of the socio-spatial history of the South, I by no means seek to position the South as an exceptional space at the expense of overshadowing the nationwide phenomenon of racialization and racism.

[5] Table 1 represents the top states with total inflow from Puerto Rico to the United States. Although Illinois is historically a major site of Puerto Rican migration, in the past several years, the state did not experience significant growth. In terms of U.S. cities, Chicago has the third largest Puerto Rican population in the United States.

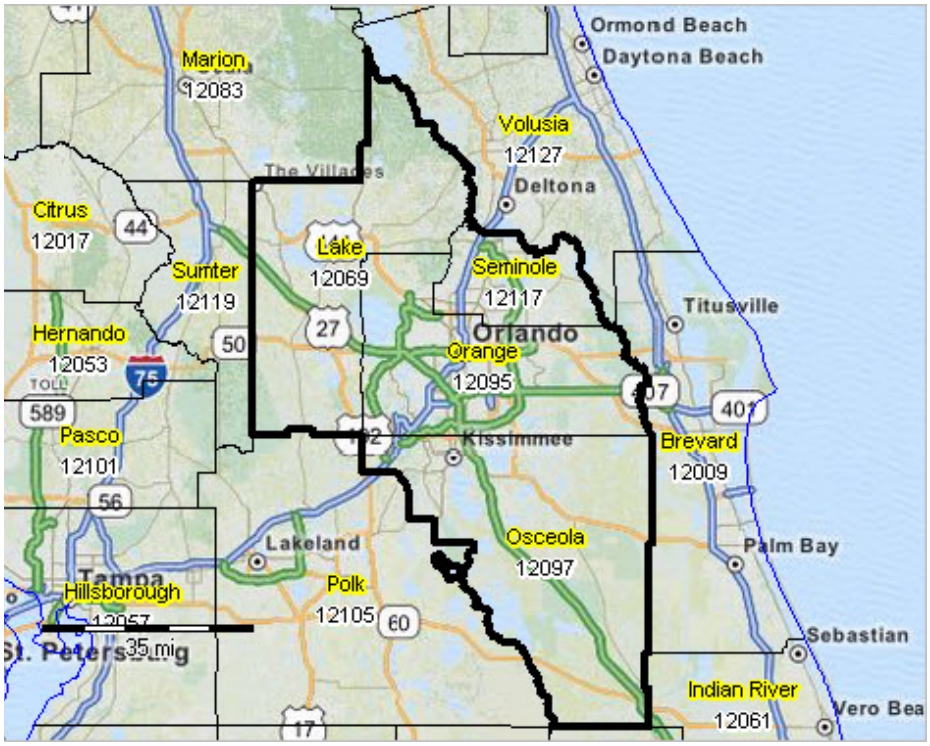

Figure 3: Map of the Orlando metropolitan area.

residents to the United States since the Great Migration of the post-World War II period. In 2017, Florida replaced New York as the state with the largest Puerto Rican population, with 1.2 million Puerto Ricans currently residing in the state. Puerto Ricans comprise over 20 percent of the state's Latinx population, with over 300,000 Puerto Ricans living in the Orlando metropolitan area (Bustamante et. al. 2019). For statistical purposes, the U.S. Census identifies the Orlando metropolitan area, sometimes also referred to as Greater Orlando or Central Florida, as the Orlando–Kissimmee–Sanford regions. My fieldwork was primarily conducted in the Orlando-Kissimmee area in Orange and Osceola counties, which contain the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the region. According to the most recent American Community

Survey (2018), Orange county has a Puerto Rican population of 209,151, while Osceola county has a Puerto Rican population of 123,897.[6]

This demographic growth has cultural, social, and political implications for the region. Silver's (2010) assessment of Florida as "a decentralized space—criss-crossed by highways and ever-present construction" (63) does more than describe the geographic landscape. The metaphor of the highway evokes the cultural, economic, and political crossings that shape the experiences of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida.[7] As Duany (2005) notes, "Many scholars are groping for a more inclusive and democratic vision of Puerto Rican culture, perhaps less 'nation centered,' comforting, and politically correct, but more representative of the diverse fragments that constitute the nation and its diaspora" (179).

The existing growing body of literature on Puerto Ricans in Central Florida provides further glimpses into these "diverse fragments." For instance, Delerme's (2020, 2013) work speaks to the intersections of race and class, and the ways that language, in particular, facilitates the racialization of Puerto Ricans and other Latinxs in Osceola and parts of Orange county. Other studies have offered additional perspectives, highlighting topics such as, the affective dimensions of migration (Aranda 2006), questions of identity (Duany 2010; Underberg 2010), the experiences of young people (Ariza 2010; Sokolowski and Maldonado 2010), and political participation (Silver 2020; Cruz 2010).[8] For instance, geographer Luis Sanchez (2009)

[6] The total population estimates of Orange and Osceola counties are 1,380,645 and 367,990, respectively.

[7] Martinez-Fernandez (2010) also argues that it is productive to position Orlando within a border framework, as Puerto Rican migrants to Orlando cross social and political frontiers.

[8] See the special issue in *CENTRO Journal* on "Puerto Rican Florida," edited by Duany and Silver (2010).

Figure 4: View of the Orlando city skyline on a raining afternoon. Photo by author, 2016.

argued that Puerto Ricans in Orlando do not see themselves as part of a larger diaspora, but view their life in Orlando as an extension of life on the archipelago. As such, they are actively engaged in the construction of a "new Puerto Rico" in Orlando. Taken together, this literature points to the heterogeneity of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida and contributes to our understandings of the diaspora to this not-so-new destination.

But questions remain regarding the contours of Puerto Rican activism in Central Florida, especially “in times of crisis.” Contrary to governor Rick Scott’s insistence that “we don't need a lot more anthropologists in the state,” anthropologists are particularly well suited to answer such questions through an ethnographic orientation towards everyday life and structures of power.

Theorizing Diaspora

In his book *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen (1997) maintains, “Diasporas tend to be messy and ragged at the edges” (17). How, then, do we begin to make sense of that mess? I posit that an ethnographic examination of travelling and dwelling in conjunction with the theoretical contributions of islandness can help elucidate those “messy and ragged” edges. The notion of diaspora has evolved since it first emerged as a term to characterize the Jewish experience. Cohen (1997) outlines different categories of diaspora, such as labor, victim, cultural, or imperial. While this typology has been criticized by scholars who maintain that diasporas may not fit neatly into one category or another, such categorizations, however flawed, may be useful in thinking about what sets apart the notion of diaspora from other processes like migration or immigration (K. Butler 2001; J. Flores 2009). Here, I take diaspora to be a mode of analysis that provokes questions of displacement, belonging, power, loss, attachment, and shared consciousness.

Central to this consideration of diaspora is the notion of traveling and dwelling. In his essays on diaspora, Clifford (1994) writes:

> Diaspora is different from travel (though it works through travel practices) in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this it is different from exile, with its frequently individualistic focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. (307-308)

The idea of "traveling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-traveling" (108), as explained through the metaphor of routes and roots, not only highlights the complexities of homeland but also disrupts linear conceptions of space and temporality. Unlike travel, diaspora implies dwelling - the

constructions of communities both real and imagined (Anderson 1983).[9] Diaspora not only provides a framework for theorizing belonging and the construction of community in its various forms, but also for exploring how the concepts of crisis and activism also facilitate "traveling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-traveling." In this dissertation, I consider the intersections of crisis and activism within the framework of diaspora, in order to attend to how crisis travels and is embodied both materially and emotionally, as well as the ways that activism involves a certain type of dwelling that binds Puerto Rican activists in Orlando to Puerto Rico.[10]

Although my fieldwork took place exclusively in the Orlando metropolitan area, it is also deeply informed by the political economy of Puerto Rico and the attachments that tether Orlando Puerto Ricans to the archipelago. This, too, makes up the "highways and ever-present construction" of Puerto Ricans everyday lives and activism. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) assert, "political economy turned the anthropological gaze in the direction of social and economic processes that connected even the most isolated of local settings with a wider world" (2). Attention to these connections allows us to reconsider frameworks, such as diaspora and islandness, within the context of crisis. Islands, for instance, occupy a unique place within Western imagination. As Gillis (2004) elucidates:

> In Western cosmogony water stands for chaos, land for order. Islands are a third kind of place, partaking of both earth and water, something betwixt and between. As liminal places, islands are frequently the location of rites of passage. We do not just think with islands, we use them as thresholds to other worlds and new lives. (4)

[9] It is important to also note the limitations of travel paradigms. Homi Bhabha (1994) urges the reader to think about dwelling in the context of immobility.

[10] As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) maintain, fieldwork itself is also "a form of dwelling that legitimizes knowledge production by the familiarity that the fieldworker gains with the ways of life of a group of people" (131).

As a set of islands “in crisis,” Puerto Rico is arguably located in the border zones of chaos and order, an idea that is complicated by processes such as diaspora and displacement.

In his foundational work, *The Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo (1992) draws on chaos theory to argue that despite the “chaos of difference,” indicated by the various colonial histories, languages, and topographies of the Caribbean, there is still something that can be indexed as "Caribbeaness." The idea of repetition amidst the “paradoxes and eccentricities of fluxes and displacements” (Benítez-Rojo 1992, 271) is particularly useful to my analysis given the heterogeneity of Central Florida’s Puerto Rican community, which is comprised of those recently displaced by events such as austerity and disaster, as well as long-time residents, transplants from other U.S. cities, and “circular” migrants (Duany 2002). This heterogeneity is also captured by the various intersections of identity along the lines or race, class, gender, and sexuality. And yet, there is something that defines these activists as Puerto Rican, while they, in turn, simultaneously redefine the borders of Puerto Rico through their activism.

Benítez-Rojo (1992) maintains that "the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago [...] and as meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center" (4). It is not limited by geographic boundaries; rather, its “poly-rhythmic cultural repetitions" are felt across space and time through processes such as diaspora. Neither activism, nor the concept of crisis, are bound by geographic boundaries. They, too, travel, dwell, and are repeated. Ultimately, by reimagining Puerto Rican activism as meta-archipelagic - that is, decentered and interconnected across diasporic borders - this dissertation complicates insular

narratives of social movements, allowing for a remapping of culture, neoliberal politics, colonialism, and notions of citizenship and belonging.[11]

Towards a Feminist Ethnography

> When women become the center of analysis, questions change and previously-held assumptions become subjects of inquiry.
>
> - Segura and Zavella, *Women and Migration in the U.S. Mexico Borderlands*

> In their various formulations, feminist theories emphasize the need to challenge sexism, colonialism, class, and other forms of inequality in the research process.
>
> - Nancy A. Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*

In the introduction to *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed (2016) asks, "What do you hear when you hear the word feminism" (1)? She immediately answers her own question, writing:

> It is a word that fills me with hope, with energy. It brings to mind loud acts of refusal and rebellion as well as the quiet ways we might have of not holding on to things that diminish us. It brings to mind women who have stood up, spoken back, risked lives, homes, relationships in the struggle for more bearable worlds. It brings to mind books written, tattered and worn, books that gave words to something, a feeling, a sense of an

[11] Edelman (2001) argues that traditional social movement theories are grounded in local political processes rather than on cultural approaches. This work shifts analyses of social movements towards the latter.

> injustice, books that, in giving us words, gave us the strength to go on. Feminism: how we pick each other up. So much history in a word; so much it too has picked up. (1)

These "acts of refusal and rebellion" are reflected in the stories of community activists, such as Evelina López Antonetty, labor organizer Luisa Capetillo, human rights activist Ana Irma Rivera Lassen, and "radical" women like Lolita Lebrón, among others.[12] They can also be found in the existing scholarship on Puerto Rican social movements in the United States, which document

Figure 5: Sign held by protester at the 2017 Women's March at Lake Eola Park in Orlando. It reads: "A Woman's Place *es en la Resistencia* (is in the Resistance)." Photo by author, 2017.

[12] For more on Lolita Lebrón, see Karrieann Soto Vega's (2018) dissertation, "Rhetorics of Defiance: Gender, Colonialism and Lolita Lebrón's Struggle for Puerto Rican Sovereignty." See also Chapter 1 of Sandra Ruiz's (2019) *Ricanness.*

women's activism in the areas of educational justice in places like Chicago and New York (Nieto 2000; Velasquez 2016), in organizations like the Young Lords (Morales 2016), or through the exercise of everyday agency and claims to rights (Benmayor et al. 1997). [13]

Within the pages of this dissertation are also the narratives of several Puerto Rican women who "have stood up" and "spoken back." In contrast to the "panels of experts," oftentimes overwhelmingly Latino men, whom I observed were often featured at various events in the community, I privilege the expertise of Puerto Rican women who were at the front lines organizing and advocating for their communities. It is through their narratives - their social and political lives, their theorizing, and their commitment to resisting inequality - that I tell the story of Puerto Rican activism in Orlando. I would not be able to do so, however, if it were not for those scholars who paved the way for critical ethnographic analyses of gender, power differentials, and their various intersections.

Nearly three decades ago, the question of whether or not there could be feminist ethnography at all was raised by feminist scholars Judith Stacey and Lila Abu-Lughod. Stacey (1988) pointed to a conflict between feminism and anthropology, arguing that feminist ethnography could not fully exist because ethnography denotes an unequal power relationship between the researcher and the researched. Abu-Lughod (1990), on the other hand, maintained that feminist ethnography could contribute to analyses of power by challenging those very inequities and countering assumptions of a universal women's experience. Despite the "awkward relationship" (Strathern 1987) between feminism and ethnography, feminist ethnography allows us to foreground "the question of social inequality vis-a-vis the lives of men, women, and

[13] See also Thomas and Santiago's (2017) *Rethinking the Struggle for Puerto Rican Right*s. Thomas and Santiago elucidate how the struggle for Puerto Rican rights in the United States began decades before the student movements of the 1960s; however, they do not focus at length on gender in their analysis.

children" (Visweswaran 1997, 593). But what exactly makes something a feminist ethnography? According to Craven and Davis (2016), feminist ethnography:

> 1. involves a feminist sensibility and commitment to paying attention to marginality and power differentials; these include not only gender, but also race, class nation, sexuality, and other areas of difference
> 2. draws inspiration from feminist scholarship – in other words our feminist intellectual genealogy is important
> 3. challenges marginalization and injustice
> 4. acknowledges] and reflects upon power relations within the research context,
> 5. aims to produce scholarship—in both traditional and experimental forms—that may contribute to movement building and/or be in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues we study. (11)

This dissertation meets these criteria in more ways than one. Feminist scholarship has opened the door not only to a critique of intersecting forms of inequality, but also to the imagining of alternative futures (Rapp 2016), both points which I explore here. It has also taught me that "what we can know will be determined by the kinds of questions we learn to ask" (M. Rosaldo 1980, 108).

I draw my inspiration from feminist genealogies. Throughout the years, there have been various iterations of feminism, oftentimes conceived of in waves.[14] The First Wave focused on women's legal rights, such as the right to vote, but was closely tied to the abolitionist and temperance movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Craven and Davis 2016).[15] The Second Wave, which began in the 1960s through the 1980s, emerged out of the

[14] A shortcoming of this Euro-American framework is that it oftentimes erases the contributions of people in other times and places, who were fighting for women's rights long before what's recognized in the west as the first wave (Craven and Davis 2016).

[15] The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, is typically regarded as the first women's rights convention and the starting point of the suffrage movement. However, the women of the first wave were not advocating for universal suffrage. Instead, they were fighting for the right to vote for women like themselves - white, property-owning women.

anti-war movement, and was also inspired by the gay and lesbian and the civil rights movements. Second wavers engaged in critiques of capitalism and patriarchy, addressing topics such as wage labor and reproductive rights. In anthropology, this translated to a central concern with the universal secondary status of women across cultures, as well binary oppositions, such as nature/culture, domestic/public, and sex/gender (Lewin and Silverstein 2016; Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974; Rubin 1975).

While I recognize the rich intellectual and social contributions of these prior waves, I am especially influenced by the scholars of the Third Wave, who generated productive critiques of power, white feminism, and the essentialized category of women (Abu-Lughod 1995; Behar 1993; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984; McClaurin 2001; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Trinh 1989; Viswesaran 1994). These scholars positioned themselves as part of a different genealogy. This genealogy includes women anthropologists of color, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Mourning Dove, and Ella Cara Deloria, who were not only attentive to questions of power and representation, but whose experimental writing crossed genres and disciplinary boundaries (Behar 1995; Gordon 1995; Harrison 1995; Hernandez 1995). Hurston, in particular, paved the way for our understanding of culture in the American South and Florida. For instance, her ethnographic and literary book, *Mules and Men,* drew on fieldwork in her hometown of Eatonville and Polk County, Florida, centering Black folklore.[16] Hurston's work pushed the boundaries of the "narrow definition of ethnography" (Hernandez, 1993, 151) through a combination of literary and ethnographic methods.

Black feminist anthropologists sought "to interrupt/disrupt the elitist, sexist, and racist dynamics that have plagued anthropology historically and that continue to inform [...]

[16] The second half of the book focuses on hoodoo practices in New Orleans, Louisiana.

anthropological knowledge production and reproduction" (McClaurin 2001, 2). Central to this intervention is an underlying focus on praxis and the decentering of knowledges, which is illustrated through a highly reflexive methodology that draws from the personal experience of what it means to be a Black woman both in the field and in everyday life. Their work ultimately reminds us "that gender is constructed in the matrix of race, class, and sexuality" (Shaw 2001, 117), an idea encompassed by the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991).[17] This intellectual tradition offers a framework for understanding how race, gender, class, and sexuality are not "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw 1989, 139), but are rather intersecting forms of oppression.

Latina feminists have also contributed methodologically to the fields of both feminist anthropology and Latinx Studies. Feminist theorists, such as Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981), have challenged white feminists to recognize racisms within the movement, as well as the multiple subject positions inhabited by women of color.[18] These contributions have inspired a new generation of Latinx studies scholars who have explored issues ranging from the divergent experiences of women and men transborder migrants (Stephen 2007) to the gendered and transnational dimensions of Puerto Rican migration across two cities (Perez 2007).

Closer to the Skin

These feminist intellectual traditions have taught us about the importance of positionality and reflexivity - the idea that "theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin" (Ahmed 2017, 20). The intellectual labor that I discuss here cannot be disconnected from my own brown,

[17] Patricia Hill Collins (1990) refers to this idea as the "matrix of domination."

[18] In her important text, Borderlands/La Frontera, Anzaldúa (1989) achieves this through her theorization of mestiza consciousness, positioning of herself as a "border woman" (i).

woman, diaspora-born skin, nor can it be separated from the webs of power that operate in my own everyday life.

In her now classic essay, "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?", Narayan (1993) points to the limitations and colonial implications of the false dichotomy of insider-outsider. Drawing on ideas of "multiplex subjectivity" (R. Rosaldo 1993), she argues that "the loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiplex and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider outsider status" (671-672).[19] Similarly, Zavella (1996) reflects on what she calls "insider dilemmas," recognizing the ways her own subjectivity as a Chicana did not align with her participants. These analyses underscore the idea that knowledge is always situated and partial (Behar and Gordon 1995; Haraway 1988; Lamphere et al. 1997; Rosaldo 1989).

There are several ways in which I, too, occupy the space between insider and outsider. Although I was born and raised in New York City, my ability to list where in Puerto Rico my parents were from, as well as my proficiency in Spanish, allowed me a certain level of cultural currency in the community.[20] But my mispronunciation of a word here and there and my accent

[19] In his essay, ''Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," Renato Rosaldo (1993) contends, "All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others. Even when knowledgeable, sensitive, fluent in the language, and able to move easily in an alien cultural world, good ethnographers still have their limits, and their analyses always are incomplete" (8).

[20] This also exposed me to stereotypical perceptions of "Nuyoricans," although this was oftentimes mitigated by my level of education and role as a researcher. Nuyorican is an amalgamation of the words nuyorquino (New Yorker) and Puerto Rican. The term became synonymous with an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement in the 1970s which centered on the experiences of Puerto Ricans in New York. It is not always geographically specific, as it is sometimes used to refer to individuals born elsewhere in the United States. But the term also has negative connotations, especially when used by island-born Puerto Ricans, and is imbued with

were often a dead giveaway that I was not from "*la isla*." In short, there were many things I did and did not know, and many experiences I shared and did not share as a now middle-class, cisgender Puerto Rican woman. For instance, I can recall several experiences of racism, like the time I was yelled at from across the parking lot by an older white woman who demanded I speak English, as I registered voters in a public shopping complex.

There were also times when my own gendered position played a role in my interactions with activists. When I told potential participants that I was centering my project on women's activism, women were overwhelmingly affirming of this focus as compared to men, often talking at length about the immense contributions of Puerto Rican women in the community and sharing with me their contacts. But there were other less positive experiences that caused me to shrink with discomfort, like the one occasion where my partner accompanied me to an event hosted by one of the community organizations. One member, a Puerto Rican man, shook his hand enthusiastically and thanked him for "letting" me spend time with them.[21] My relationship to the field also changed in December 2016 when I became pregnant. "Politics in rice and beans terms" (see Chapter 3) took on added meaning, as I marched in the Women's March, angry and uncertain about the world my son would soon be born into.[22]

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the racialization of U.S. born Puerto Ricans. For instance, in her ethnographic fieldwork in Chicago and San Sebastian (Puerto Rico), Perez (2002) notes that "*los de afuera*" (41), those from the outside, who were born or lived for an extensive period of time in the United States, were perceived as lazy, drug-addicted, or criminals. Young women, in particular, were both racialized and sexualized as loud, immoral, and promiscuous.

[21] I and other young women in the community were sometimes also referred to affectionately as "*la nena*," despite the fact that several of us were in our 30s.

[22] In her essay, "A Tale of Two Pregnancies," Abu-Lughod (1995) illustrates that fieldwork is not a unidirectional experience - anthropologists, too, are affected by the encounter. Like Rosaldo (1993) in "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," there were things she did not understand about her participants until she herself experienced pregnancy.

Yolanda, one of my primary interlocutors once told me, “The sociologists and anthropologists they want to look at it but they don’t want to fix it. You come from a community that has always been challenged and therefore you have a moral obligation as far as I’m concerned, whereas they don’t. They have the privilege to be able to put their nose up at it.”

I nodded, as I felt the weight of her words descend upon me.

“I don’t see how you can say, I’m just going to write about,” she continued, “I’m just going to watch from afar.’ I’m going to talk to those who do it, but not do it myself. You know, I could see you at the Women’s March just as easily as I saw myself.”

Yolanda was right. Even if it were possible, I could never be a “detached observer”[23] I protest, I march, I volunteer and I write because I cannot “watch from afar.” My positionality, in turn, informs my methodology and my engaged approach to anthropology. According to Low (2014), engaged anthropology refers to "those activities that grow out of a commitment to the participants and communities’ anthropologists work with and a values-based stance that anthropological research respect the dignity and rights of all people and have a beneficent effect on the promotion of social justice” (34). Ultimately, my research called for a particular convergence of method and theory in order to “better understand the root causes of inequality, oppression, violence and related conditions of human suffering” (Hale, 2001, 13).

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[23] Renato Rosaldo (1993) countered classic anthropological notions of a “detached” observer, arguing that “knowledge and power are intertwined because the observer’s point of view always influences the observations she makes” (p.xviii).

Convergence of Method and Theory

> Ethnography – where everything your family teaches you about not talking to strangers, going into their homes, and traveling with them, goes out the window.
>
> - Fieldnotes, July 18, 2016

In 2012, I came across a special issue of *CENTRO Journal on* "Puerto Rican Florida," edited by Jorge Duany and Patricia Silver (2010). The articles included in the issue covered a range of topics, such as migration history, identity, homeownership, education, and health. I chose Florida as a field site, shortly after, conducting initial preliminary research in Tampa in Summer 2013. During this time, I volunteered with a local non-profit organization whose mission was to provide services in the areas of health, education, and citizenship to Latinxs in the area. I conducted participant observation of organizational functions and events in the community, such as festivals and protests. It was during that summer that Trayvon Martin's murderer was acquitted. I also formally interviewed twelve Puerto Ricans, who were involved in non-profit organizing, local activism, and church activities. Although my dissertation fieldwork eventually brought me to Orlando and not Tampa, due to my partner's employment and personal preference, this research informed my orientation towards issues of social justice.

I arrived in Orlando, in January 2016, with my partner who took a job at a local hospital. After an initial housing debacle, which included a moldy refrigerator and a conflict with an unresponsive landlord, we moved into a two-bedroom apartment off Sand Lake Rd. in Orange County, near the tourist corridor off I-4. The traffic and hustle and bustle of the area were

overwhelming (even for a New Yorker). The sprawling landscape of the city made it nearly impossible to identify an "ideal" location from which to observe Puerto Rican activism. As a result, I would travel all over the city.

Since it was an election year, in those early months, I reached out to *Mi Familia Vota* (MFV), a national civic engagement organization that supports voter participation and immigrant justice.[24] I met with the director of the Orlando office to see how I could get involved in get out the vote efforts. Through MFV, I met Jorge, who graciously invited me to join *Iniciativa* for a trip to Philadelphia during the Democratic National Convention. I became participant observer of many of their meetings and events. Several members offered names and contacts of others who they felt would contribute to my research, to which I am eternally grateful. I did not arrive in Orlando with previous contacts, so this method of snowball sampling was central to recruiting participants, especially in those early stages. I made further contacts by remaining informed of local events through social media or newspapers like the *Orlando Sentinel*. I paid attention to reoccurring names on topics pertaining to Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, and would sometimes reach out to those people or ask existing contacts if they knew them. In these ways, I became acquainted with other activists and their affiliated organizations, such as *Misión Boricua*, *Vamos4PR*, and Hispanic Federation, just to name a few. I participated in rallies and protests, *caravanas*, voter registration events, and social gatherings. I attended panel discussions, festivals, parades, and press conferences. At the end of the day, I wrote down my thoughts and reflections in my moleskin notebook, piecing together the various jottings I took throughout the day. I often fought the urge to go straight to bed, remembering the words of my advisor who

[24] While several Puerto Ricans collaborated and allied with the organization, as I would later learn, MFV was also subject to criticism for the lack of Puerto Rican representation among its leadership and what some perceived to be their reluctance to take on "Puerto Rican issues."

once told me about fieldwork: “If you’re not tired at the end of the day, you’re not doing it right.”

While participant observation allowed me to examine responses to “crisis,” such as grassroots organizing, instances of claim-making, and the challenges and successes of movement-building, interviews enabled me to delve deeper – to peel back the layers of intersectional identities, the force of attachments, and the ways that “crisis” is not abstract. I conducted 48 semi and unstructured interviews, in addition to countless informal conversations, with activists, politicians, and Puerto Rican migrants, who were born either in Puerto Rico or the United States and were now living in the Orlando metropolitan area.

Duany (2002) has described Puerto Rico as a “*nacion en vaiven*” (2), a “nation on the move,” characterized by heterogeneities of identity, language, schooling, and other experiences. The majority of my participants were born in Puerto Rico but had spent varying amounts of time living in other parts of the United States. Others were born in the United States but spent some time living in Puerto Rico and a third subset had never lived on the archipelago but moved to Florida upon retirement or to follow employment opportunities. Of those 48 interviewed, 37 identified as women, 9 as men, and 2 as gender queer. Interviews ranged from one hour to four hours, with the average interview lasting two hours. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish, or Spanglish, which refers to some combination of the two.

I complemented my ethnographic data with archival research, which included examinations of online collections of local newspapers, such as the *Orlando Sentinel* and *El Sentinel*, and blogs such as *Orlando Latino*. I also reviewed social media archives of popular local Puerto Rican and Latinx groups. I drew on census archives, such as the American Community Survey (ACS), for demographic data. This archival research allowed me to further

situate the social and demographic landscape of the state, city, and counties where I conducted this research. Lastly, I took photographs of public events, as well as elements of material culture, careful not to include any identifying features of my interlocutors. These photographs are incorporated throughout, not only for the rich cultural, social, and material elements they capture, but also as an aid to theoretical analysis.

Outline of Chapters

In addition to this introduction (Chapter 1), this dissertation is organized into two parts, and ends with an epilogue. Part I, "Beyond Crisis: Gender, Politics, and U.S. Empire," addresses the everydayness of "crisis." Crisis is about much more than catastrophe. It is historical, it is lived, and it is embodied. Chapter 2, "'*La Mujer Abusada'*: The Discourse of Abuse and the Fractals of Austerity," draws on the gendered metaphor of an "abused woman" used by one of my interlocutors to describe the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Through a discussion of the more than $73 billion debt crisis in Puerto Rico and the 2016 passing of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), I outline the historical and contemporary factors that have led to an upsurge of austerity measures on the archipelago. Part and parcel of my analysis are the ways that the evocation of crisis obscures the ways that austerity and colonialism function as two sides of the same coin that both lead to emotional and corporal displacements. Ultimately, by demonstrating how austerity travels and is felt across distances, I argue that austerity, like the discourse of abuse, denotes an intimate and violent force that permeates all facets of social life.

Chapter 3, "'Politics in Rice and Beans': Puerto Rican Women's Electoral and Participatory Politics," centers the political lives of Puerto Rican women who took to the streets

to register voters, lead campaigns, and run for office, during the 2016 local and national elections. I argue that while Puerto Rican women must still contend with gendered expectations of political work, they are deeply involved in public forms of placemaking that demonstrate the intertwined nature of power and participation. Moreover, I show how crisis also manifests itself in the age-old question of who has the authority to represent Puerto Ricans in Central Florida's changing demographic landscape.

Part II "(Un)natural Disasters: Mass Shootings, Hurricanes, and Constructions of Community," reflects more traditional renderings of "crisis" as catastrophe. The chapters included here explore women's activism around moments of incomprehensible loss and destruction. Chapter 4, "'*Somos Orlando*' (We are Orlando): Sexuality, Gender and the Language of Crisis," is about silences and refusals. It follows the efforts of a group of Puerto Rican and Latina women who mobilized to combat media narratives that erased queer brown and black bodies from the tragedy at Pulse nightclub, and went on to found an organization to meet the bilingual and mental health needs of survivors and their families.

Chapter 5, "Assemblages of Citizenship: Worth, Community, and the Aesthetics of Disaster," draws on what Ramos-Zayas (2003) refers to as the "politics of worthiness." I argue that while on the one hand Puerto Ricans must assert worthiness and belonging in relation to the U.S. nation-state, on the other, they must also prove their worth in relation to each other. I show how post-Maria activism in Orlando forces us not only to envision recovery beyond the borders of the archipelago, but also to reassess configurations of citizenship and belonging.

I conclude with the epilogue, "A Hot Summer's Day," which reflects on events since the conclusion of my fieldwork, such as the #RickyRenuncia movement, which led to the resignation

of Puerto Rico's Gov. Ricardo Rosselló. I also revisit questions of crisis and activism across transnational spaces, as we look towards the future.

PART I

BEYOND CRISIS: GENDER, POLITICS, AND U.S. EMPIRE

CHAPTER 2

"*LA MUJER ABUSADA*":

THE DISCOURSE OF ABUSE AND THE FRACTALS OF AUSTERITY

> [A]usterity is a campaign to transform everyday life, including when the urgency of austerity as crisis-response has passed, and that this campaign seeks to remake the terrain of the social in such a manner that previous agreements about equality and the reach of mutuality are under threat.
>
> - Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Crisis, Austerity, and Everyday Life*

Yvette fondly remembers the smell of the rain falling onto the muddy earth of her barrio in Gurabo, as she and her siblings rode their bikes into puddles. "Rainy days are happy days," she told me as she was transported back to the kitchen table where we sat in the apartment she shares with her son, who just started college, and her recently arrived niece from Puerto Rico. Yvette came to the United States after marrying her ex-husband at the age of nineteen. After spending some time living in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and a return back to Puerto Rico, Yvette arrived in Central Florida at the close of 1999 in hopes of providing better opportunities for her then-two-year-old son.

The fiscal crisis, Yvette argues, is the result of "missed opportunities," not a symptom of what she claims others have characterized as the "*syndrome de la mujer abusada*" ("battered woman syndrome"). I had never heard this metaphor used in this context. Who compared Puerto Rico to a battered woman? And what did it mean?

"When Puerto Rico has been described by certain people in the media, they make reference that Puerto Rico is like the abused woman that always comes back to the abuser because it depends on the economic part of it," Yvette explained, as her dog began to bark in the adjacent room.

"And they use that as a description because Puerto Rico depends economically on the United States, but the United States abuses Puerto Rico … In my view, I accept that, yes, there have been abuses to the Puerto Rican community in Puerto Rico by the United States. Look at Vieques…We give more than what we get in return…It makes you think that, yes, you are abusing us. We don't have all the rights. We can't even vote for the president but you go over there to get money for campaigns, you go over there to get support in the primaries, but why don't you give us full representation in Congress?" [25]

Yvette's words forced me to rethink how the fiscal crisis is framed by activists. What do the discourse of abuse and austerity have in common? And what does it reveal about the historical and contemporary relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico? This chapter considers these questions as a starting point.

Spanish is a gendered language, with nouns taking feminine (ending in -a) or masculine (ending in -o) form. Puerto Rico is often referred to simply as "*la isla*" (the island), a feminine

[25] Vieques is one of the three inhabited islands of Puerto Rico (the others are the main island of Puerto Rico and Culebra), located to the southeast of the main island. Since World War II, the United States used Vieques as a navy training installation, on which they conducted live bombings. Vieques became a site of resistance as activists, such as fishermen on the island, struggled against threats made to their livelihood and pushed to expel the navy (see McCaffrey 2006, 2002). While the Navy did eventually leave the installation in 2003, the effects of their actions are felt until this day. The Navy confessed to using dangerous chemicals, including Agent Orange, napalm, and depleted uranium that was released into the environment (Baver 2006). Vieques has a higher rate of sickness, including cancer, as compared to other parts of the Caribbean (Figueroa et. al. 2009).

noun. The equation of Puerto Rico with a "battered woman" in the excerpt above is, therefore, an explicitly gendered metaphor that aligns with the colloquial and literary construction of Puerto Rico as feminine. In the 1970s, "battered woman syndrome" (BWS) emerged in the psychological literature to describe a set of symptoms caused by women's experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV). Psychologist Lenore Walker (1979) defines BWS as a "learned helplessness" that compels women to remain in abusive relationships. But in the past few decades, BWS has come under increasing scrutiny by scholars who are critical of Walker's pathologizing of women as "helpless" and ignoring the structural conditions that contribute to IPV (Adelman 2004; McGillivray and Comaskey 1999; Osthoff & Maguigan, 2005; Websdale 1998).

But there is something analytically productive behind the metaphor of abuse, as it pertains particularly to intimate partner violence. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, intimate partner violence (IPV) "is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship" (n.d., par. 1). While by no means trivializing the lived reality of millions of victims and survivors of IPV, this chapter examines the ways that austerity is a form of domestic violence - a "code for physical and emotional brutality within intimate relationships" (Ferraro 1996, 77). I argue that austerity is an "abusive" and intimate force that permeates multiple facets of social life.

In what follows, I detail what I call the "fractals of austerity" – that is, the ways that austerity is repeated across different scales of experience both in Puerto Rico and in its diaspora to the Orlando area. Through these ethnographic portraits, I call attention to what Catherine Lutz (2006) refers to as the "details" of empire – "the costs of empire on human bodies and social worlds, the vulnerabilities of empire to erosion or eviction, and the insights and alternatives that

antiempire activists have been working on" (598). In particular, I examine how the question of sovereignty, as explicated through Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States and recent events, such as the 2016 passing of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), is central to the discursive construction of abuse. But, as I also explore later in this chapter, Puerto Ricans are far from "passive, submissive, 'helpless'" (Walker 1979, 47) victims of abuse. They are calling out their "abuser(s)" and demanding accountability.

The Puerto Rican debt crisis has ushered in a new generation of resistance. On the archipelago, student activists at the University of Puerto Rico denounce tuition hikes and the reduction of subsidies that threaten their access to higher education (Rosa 2018); workers shut down business operations and protest privatization and austerity, often met with tear gas (Clary 1998; Romo and Florido 2018); groups like *La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción* are fighting back against the often unspoken and gendered violence of austerity (Herrera 2019; Guzman 2019); and people across different social locations– young, old, queer – are taking to the streets to demand the resignation of a Puerto Rican governor (Santiago-Ortiz and Meléndez-Badillo 2019). But the anti-austerity movement has also taken root (and route) in Orlando, reminding us that oppression and opposition, while oftentimes place-based, are far from insular. But before I begin, it is important to briefly contextualize what it is meant by austerity within a global and national framework.

Defining Austerity

> Indeed, by now, the culprit in recession is austerity—not an abstracted 'crisis.'"
>
> - Theodore Powers and Theodoros Rakopoulos, "The Anthropology of Austerity"

Oftentimes emerging as a prescription for debt crises, austerity refers to political-economic practices aimed at severely decreasing government deficit spending at the expense of public-sectors of the economy (Blyth 2013). While not synonymous, austerity and neoliberalism oftentimes operate in tandem, with austerity measures reinforcing neoliberal goals of income redistribution, the shrinking of the welfare state, and the privatization of public sectors (Blyth 2013; Farnsworth and Irving 2018; Whiteside 2016).

In recent decades, the Eurozone crisis has become synonymous with austerity. For instance, in 2009, after Greece announced an estimated fiscal deficit of 12.5% of GDP, the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided a bailout in exchange for austerity measures. Greece was faced with austerity measures, such as cuts to pensions, wage reductions, increased taxes, and the privatization of public sectors (Blyth 2013; Doxiadis and Placas 2018; Faubion et. al. 2016; Kyriakopoulos 2011). Other countries in the EU, such as Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus, followed suit, also receiving bailouts accompanied by imposed austerity measures. But austerity is not a condition limited to the European union (Powers and Rakopoulos 2019). In the United States, the banking crisis of 2008, a precursor to global economic decline, led to Republican calls for austerity (Blyth 2013; McGahey 2013). Cities, such as New York and Detroit, have also experienced instances of austerity which

targeted public-sector employees, education, and transformed urban industries (Susser 2016). These instances have taught us that austerity measures do not ensure economic and social stability, but rather lead to further instability (Blyth 2013).

In the summer of 2015, Puerto Ricans watched as Governor Alejandro García Padilla announced in a televised addressed that Puerto Rico's more than $70 billion debt was unpayable. Over the years, the archipelago has been subject to a slew of increased austerity measures, such as the layoffs of thousands of government employees, pension cuts, school closures, as well as proposals to reduce minimum wage and privatize public utilities. Because of this Puerto Rico is often compared to Greece by the popular media, with some going as far as to dub the archipelago the "Greece of the Caribbean" (O'Donoghue 2015; Greene 2013). According to Papailias (2016), neither Greece nor Puerto Rico were "allowed to default nor deemed worthy of relief, both appear as an outrageous assault on—and a contagion to—the political and economic order of things that boxed them into their untenable positions in the first place" (para. 6).

While it is true that both countries defaulted on their debt and were subject to austerity measures that have transformed economic, political, and quotidian life, Puerto Rico is not the "Greece of the Caribbean." There are dissimilarities, such as Puerto Rico's status as a United States unincorporated territory, which has led to its inability to legally restructure its own debt. This, in conjunction with a history marred by the implications of a number of colonial political and economic policies have arguably led to this moment of crisis. It is to this disjuncture that I now turn.

The PROMESA of Colonialism

> For after all, history is not just about the past, nor is it always about change. It may be about duration, about patterns persisting over long periods of time.
>
> - Sherry Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*

Out on the detached patio of La Lechonera El Jibarito Restaurant in Kissimmee, it felt like Puerto Rico. The facades of the colorful *casitas* (little houses) of Old San Juan - a sea of bright yellow, green, and purple – adorned the furthest wall from the entrance. Trees rustled outside the exposed wooden beams, as the ceiling fans overhead circulated the hot, humid air steeped with the aroma of *café* (coffee). It was there, in May 2016, that twenty-one members of *Iniciativa Acción Puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican Action Initiative) crowded behind a podium to discuss the recently proposed HR 5278 bill. *Iniciativa*, as it was commonly referred to in the community, was founded in 2015 with the goal of organizing and encouraging the civic participation of Puerto Ricans in Florida.

Jorge, the president of the organization, began by explaining why we were there:

"To make sure we send a clear message to the house of representatives on the abusive imposition of a control board to Puerto Rico," he said, appealing to the press and the handful of us scattered in the audience to speak out against the impending bill.

"For us in Florida to understand why we need to be involved in that, a couple of things: First, for our families that live in Puerto Rico and that was the most important part. There is a humanitarian crisis happening right now in Puerto Rico. And the second part is, because of that,

just to give you an example, in one year 70,000 people left the island...One doctor every day is leaving the island." Members of *Iniciativa* nodded in approval or perhaps disapproval at the social realities facing millions of Puerto Ricans.

"So it's like one after the other," Jorge continued, "a big crisis is happening in Puerto Rico. What happens is that all these people are coming to places like Florida and now we have public schools here in Osceola, because they were not prepared ten years ago to build those classrooms to hold the amount of kids that are coming from Puerto Rico."

Puerto Rico is currently experiencing the largest migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, since what is commonly referred to as the "Great Migration" following World War II. From 2005 to 2015, San Juan, Puerto Rico experienced a nearly 10 percent decline in population (Krogstad et. al. 2017). The archipelago's population loss has since been exacerbated by Hurricane Maria, which has contributed to an additional 4 percent population decline since 2017 (Flores and Krogstad 2019). While Jorge underscored the human costs of the fiscal crisis and its effects on institutions, such as schools, another member of *Iniciativa*, a seasoned lawyer and professor in the community, took to the podium to express the unconstitutionality of the bill.

"*Tenemos una manera de expresar en Arecibo* (We have a saying in Arecibo)*,"* he began, *"El que esta en el piso, no se patea"* (You don't kick a person while they're down). That was exactly what the United States was doing to Puerto Rico, he argued, with this proposed bill. The solution was quite "simple."

"Provéanos a nosotros los puertorriqueños la capacidad que teníamos antes del 1984. Permítanos a coger al capítulo 9 de la ley de quiebra federal" (Provide us Puerto Ricans with the capacity we had before 1984. Allow us to take Chapter 9 of the Federal Bankruptcy Act), he said, his voice rising with each syllable. *"Y si no lo quieren hacer, pues permítanos entonces el*

derecho constitucional de crear nuestra propia ley de quiebras de hacerlo a nuestra manera. Eso es lo que tienen que hacer¡" (And if they don't want to do it, then allow us the constitutional right to create our own bankruptcy law to do it our way. That is what they have to do!)

Members of *Iniciativa* were discussing a bill introduced to Congress by Rep. Sean Duffy, which is known today as the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). PROMESA was signed into law by President Barack Obama just a month after the press conference at El Jibarito. However, before PROMESA was even proposed, there were a series of lawsuits and legislation that speak to the heart of the question of constitutionality that *el licenciado* so passionately posed.[26]

On June 28, 2014, the government of Puerto Rico passed the Puerto Rico Corporation Debt Enforcement and Recovery Act (Recovery Act) in an attempt to provide a pathway for public corporations to restructure their debt. As a result, several holders of public bonds sued Puerto Rico, arguing that the Recovery Act violated Congress' power to "establish uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies throughout the United States" (United States Constitution Article 1, Section 8, Clause 4). While the United States District Court ruled in favor of the creditors, the decision was appealed and ultimately heard in front of the United States Supreme Court. On June 13, 2016, in the case of Puerto Rico v. Franklin Cal. Tax-Free Trust, the Supreme Court upheld the district court's ruling, affirming that the Recovery Act is preempted by United States bankruptcy laws that prohibit states from filing their own bankruptcy legislation (U.S. Code Title 11). According to the law, only a state's municipalities are eligible to file for bankruptcy under Chapter 9. Although Puerto Rican municipalities were allowed to declare bankruptcy, similar to United States cities like Detroit, that all changed without explanation, in 1984, when Congress

[26] In Spanish "*licenciado"* is a title typically used to refer to those with advanced degrees.

amended United States bankruptcy code. The revised document maintained that "the term 'State' includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, except for the purpose of defining who may be a debtor under chapter 9 of this title" (U.S. Bankruptcy Code Section 101(U.S. Code § 101) As a consequence of this colonial legal measure, Puerto Rico's municipalities are not eligible to file as debtors under Chapter 9, and the archipelago is unable to pass its own restructuring legislation.

On June 30, 2016, two weeks after the Supreme Court ruling, President Barack Obama signed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) into law. The stated purpose of the legislation was to "create a structure for exercising federal oversight over the fiscal affairs of territories" (PROMESA). PROMESA was divided into seven titles:

> Title I - Establishment and Organization of Oversight Board
> Title II - Responsibilities of Oversight Board
> Title III - Adjustment of Debts
> Title IV - Miscellaneous Provisions
> Title V - Puerto Rico Infrastructure Revitalization
> Title VI - Creditor Collective Action
> Title VII - Sense of Congress Regarding Permanent, Pro-Growth Fiscal Reforms (U.S. Public Law 114-187)

However, the sections that drew the most controversy were those having to do with the establishment of the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), known colloquially as *la junta* (the board). The board consists of seven voting members appointed by the President of the United States and one non-voting ex-officio member selected by Puerto Rico's governor. What is perhaps most significant about the creation of this board is that Puerto Ricans are effectively locked out of the decision-making process. According to Delasalas (2018):

> PROMESA is not an aberration in constitutional law. Rather, PROMESA highlights a major problem in the Constitution: the virtually limitless power granted to Congress to regulate the Territories of the United States. PROMESA is one of many examples of how Congress has wielded that power to treat the U.S. Territories as colonies and thereby betray the United States' democratic values. (764)

While it is true that PROMESA exemplifies the plenary power of Congress, this key piece of legislation also affirms the discursive role of "territory" or "commonwealth" as little more than placeholders for "colony." The loss of sovereignty did not begin, nor end with PROMESA. It harkens back to centuries old racialized evaluations of who is capable of self-governance.

Puerto Rico has a long history of colonialism dating back to 1493 with the start of the Spanish colonial period, which ended in 1898.[27] During the Spanish colonial period, Puerto Ricans, under the *Partido Autonomista Puertorriqueño* (Puerto Rican Autonomist Party), fought to develop greater autonomy from Spain. Their efforts, however, were derailed when, in 1898, Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States at the conclusion the Spanish-American War, along with Guam and the Philippines (Duany 2017; Godreau 2015).[28] United States colonialism ushered in a complete transformation of social, cultural, political, and economic life, as demonstrated by the demise of coffee and tobacco industries, as well as a slew of policies aimed at Americanization (Caban 2002; del Moral 2013; Go 2008; Nieto 2000). But perhaps most relevant to the discussion at hand is the fact that Puerto Rico, as Godreau (2015) maintains, "is deeply entangled with the United States, with few opportunities to develop an economy outside the U.S. purview" (22). This is demonstrated, in part, through the reliance of Puerto Rico on

[27] In 1508, Juan Ponce de León established the first Spanish settlement. While beyond the purview of this dissertation, several scholars have written on this period (Duany 2017; Rodriguez Silva 2012; Whalen 2005).

[28] According to the Treaty of Paris, "The civil rights and political status of the native inhabitants of the territories…ceded to the United States shall be determined by Congress" (as cited in Torruella 2013).

United States goods and the imposition of tariffs aimed at controlling the archipelago's economy. For instance, the Foraker Act of 1900 established a civil government in Puerto Rico, with a governor appointed by the United States president. But it also placed tariffs on goods imported from Puerto Rico to the United States, setting the precedent for what became known as the Insular Cases of 1901.

The Insular Cases were a series of Supreme Court cases that called to question the status of United States territories.[29] Perhaps the most well-known of these cases is Downes v. Bidwell. The plaintiff, Samuel Downes, argued that the new tariffs imposed by the Foraker Act were not in accordance with the Uniformity Clause of the United States Constitution, which stated that "all duties, imposts, and excises shall be uniform throughout the United States" (U.S. Const. art. I, §8). The court ruled that the United States Constitution did not apply to Puerto Rico, an archipelago "inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws, methods of taxation, and modes of thought," in which "the administration of government and justice, according to Anglo-Saxon principles, may for a time be impossible" (Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244, 287).[30]

The Insular Cases established the doctrine of territorial incorporation, which defined the difference between incorporated and unincorporated territories, the former of which could be eligible for statehood. It also gave United States Congress absolute power to apply or withhold the protections of the Constitution in unincorporated territories, and maintained that the United States could govern Puerto Rico as both foreign and domestic (Venator-Santiago 2017). As an

[29] For a more in-depth analysis of the Insular Cases, see Malavet (2010); Melendez (2013), Sparrow (2006), Torruella (2013, 1988), and Venator-Santiago (2006).

[30] These words were written by Justice Brown, who also wrote the majority opinion for Plessy v. Ferguson, which maintained the constitutionality of racial segregation laws. The same court issued both decisions.

"unincorporated territory" Puerto Ricans on the archipelago are not protected by the United States constitution, while their counterparts in the diaspora are, leading scholars like Duany (2003) to position Puerto Rican migration in the "ambiguous space between 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' population movements" (42). But more than a question of whether "the Constitution follows the flag," the Insular Cases reflected racist ideologies that were based on the belief that Puerto Ricans, as an "alien race," were not only unfit to govern themselves, but were also unworthy of the full rights of the United States constitution (Caban 2017; Torruella 2013; Whalen 2005). The rulings of the Insular Cases still stand today, and Puerto Ricans continue to face proposed tax reforms as a "foreign" entity, not protected by the uniformity clause of the United States.

There are other key pieces of colonial legislation whose legacy is still felt today. The Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 imposed United States citizenship on Puerto Ricans and created a civil legislative system. But the law also set a triple tax-exemption for government-issued bonds, which attracted a number of investors to the archipelago (Morales 2019). Decades later, in 1947, Operation Bootstrap (*Manos a la Obra*) ushered in a renewed focus on foreign investments and encouraged the migration of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans (Ayala and Bernabe 2009; Perez 2004). The industrialization program, which signaled the final turn away from the sugar industry, is sometimes referred to as "'industrialization by invitation' because it relied on US investments in export manufacturing, lured by tax incentives" (Duany 2017, 69). These tax incentives were later revised, in 1976, under Section 936 of Internal Revenue Code, which granted United States corporations federal tax exemptions on income earned in Puerto Rico. This further contributed to an increase in manufacturing, especially in the pharmaceutical industry (Feliciano 2018). But by 1996, Congress decided to phase out these incentives, leading

corporations to leave Puerto Rico and serving as a catalyst for the archipelago's economic distress (Bonilla and LeBron 2019; Lloréns 2018). As a result, Puerto Rico began to issue bonds to hedge funds and vulture funds, in order to finance government operations.[31] As Bonilla and LeBron (2019) ascertain:

> Because the archipelago had no national sovereignty, it was restricted from making trade pacts with neighbors, unable to develop a national economy that repatriated profits, and forced to go into deep debt in the form of bond issuances that were needed just to maintain operating expenses for governmental agencies and essential services. (308)

The consequences of these factors were compounded by the fact that Puerto Rico's constitution requires that public debt be paid before other government expenses (Walsh 2015). Ultimately, colonialism has set the stage for the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico, which has resulted in the implementation of austerity measures and the establishment of a fiscal control board that reaffirms the plenary power of Congress over unincorporated territories.

"Vamos pa'la convención" (We're going to the convention): Towards a National Puerto Rican Agenda

Somos Boricua, vamos pa'la convención.
Por Puerto Rico, luchamos de corazón.
Sin partidismo, sin ninguna division,
por Puerto Rico, luchamos de corazón.
No es sacrificio, lo hacemos de corazón.
De la Florida, aquí con la coalición.

We're Puerto Rican, we're going to the convention.
For Puerto Rico, we fight from the heart.
Without partisanship, without division,
For Puerto Rico, we fight from the heart.

[31] Vulture funds are a type of hedge fund that make a profit by buying junk bonds from distressed companies or countries.

It is not a sacrifice, we do it from our heart.
From Florida, we're here with the coalition.

- Andy, "The Music Man"

If we return to the "battered woman" discourse that opened this chapter, in the face of the continually shattered illusion of sovereignty, the question often arises questions: Does one stay or does one go? It is a loaded question manifest in the contentious debates around Puerto Rico's political status that continue to pit people and political parties against one another.[32] In my conversations with Puerto Ricans in Orlando, some viewed statehood as the solution to the fiscal crisis, while others advocated for decolonization. Opposition to PROMESA, was similarly divided among Puerto Ricans. This played out in Congress with Rep. Luis Gutierrez opposing the bill for establishing an "unelected control board that has no accountability to the people it is controlling" (González 2016), while Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez supported the bill as a better alternative than to "sit by and do nothing" ("Velázquez" 2016). As I will discuss in the next section, these schisms, marked by underlying questions of sovereignty, can sometimes present obstacles to resistance and solidarity building.

***

It was still dark out when I arrived at the gate for my 6:20 am flight out of Orlando International Airport. It was not long before members and invited guests of *Iniciativa* arrived and

[32] There are three registered political parties in Puerto Rico: the Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP), known for their pro-statehood stance; the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), which is pro-commonwealth; and the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP), which supports independence for the archipelago.

settled in around me. With the fog of sleeplessness still heavy in the air, we boarded the flight to the Philadelphia International Airport. When we arrived, we were met with a banner that welcomed us to the 2016 Democratic National Convention. We took turns taking photos by the banner, re-energized by our agenda or perhaps the short naps on the plane. Although we were not there to actually attend the convention, Puerto Ricans from across the nation were rallying together in the next couple days, with three primary goals: (1) to bring visibility to the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico, (2) advocate for the release of political prisoner Oscar López Rivera, and (3) to convene the Constituent Assembly for National Puerto Rican Agenda (NPRA) for the first time, establishing a "watchdog" organization to monitor the fiscal oversight control board.

Figure 6: Banner inside Philadelphia International Airport. Photo by author, 2016.

A passenger van was waiting outside to take us directly to the Camden Technology Center for the NPRA meeting. NPRA is a non-partisan, national coalition that emerged as a response to the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico. According to the proposed bylaws, "the mission of the National Puerto Rican Agenda is to unite, organize, mobilize, and empower stateside Puerto Ricans to advance the interests of Puerto Rican people" (NPRA). When we arrived, the meeting had just begun and the conference room was already crowded with over a hundred leaders, activists, and members of grassroots and non-profit organizations from cities like Philadelphia, Camden, New York, Miami, and Orlando. The chair of the meeting addressed the room, setting the tone for the rest of the day:

> We realize that some of these issues may be contentious and with this in mind, I'd like to make some points about PROMESA. We realize that there are people in this room who supported PROMESA, not by choice but out of necessity, primarily because of its debt restructuring provisions. We realize that there are people in this room that strongly oppose PROMESA, primarily because of the provisions relating to the control board. We also realize that however we feel about PROMESA, we still have to contend with it because it is federal law…We have…come to Camden, NJ to help Puerto Rico weather PROMESA. And that is something that NPRA can do by monitoring implementation of this legislation, making sure that whatever happens benefits the people of Puerto Rico. It's the role of the NPRA to watch congress and the fiscal control board like a hawk.

She explained the process for the assembly. One by one, she would read each motion and call on six people – three in support of the motion and three in opposition - to approach one of the two microphones set up along opposite sides of the room to briefly make their case. Motions would then pass by two-thirds majority.

While the assembly discussed a total of nine pre-drafted motions, the first was the most polarizing. It read:

> The NPRA recognizes the gravity of the potential effects of PROMESA on Puerto Rico's socio-economic development and calls for the implementation of a plan of action to advocate for the interests of the Puerto Rican people that includes: the creation of a specialized policy chapter of the NPRA in Washington, D.C., that will serve as an advocacy watchdog representing the NPRA members on matters in the capitol and

> coordination with other NPRA members' educational and action campaigns to activate all members of our network on relevant and urgent policy issues.

No sooner was the last word read, when a man in the audience interjected to ask if there would be an opportunity to discuss the motion.

"In your preamble you stated that we, here, all have questions about the legislation PROMESA, that some of us have accepted it because it was imposed," he said, addressing the chair. "But there is no mention that there is an imposition and a taking away of democracy of the Puerto Rican people within that motion."

"What this motion is saying is that this group will form a watchdog committee so that they can go in Puerto Rico and not allow abuse," responded a woman in the audience. "So, listen, whether or not we are for or against PROMESA, at this point in time, it doesn't matter because it is the law and it's going to happen."

The room was tense as debate intensified over whether to amend the language of the motion. While several participants argued that the language suggested that NPRA supported PROMESA instead of standing with Puerto Ricans organizing on the archipelago, others spoke equally passionately in favor of the motion, insisting that we needed to "be a united voice." But there was no process in place to amend the motion. "Why?" people asked, as muffled conversations spread across the room. Despite strong objections, the motion eventually passed.

"Sometimes the best of decisions are those that we are happy about some elements and unhappy about others," the chair said. "That shows consensus."

However, it was clear that there was no consensus. After an afternoon of breakout sessions, there was a request to suspend the assembly rules in order to make an amendment to

Figure 7: Inside the National Puerto Rican Agenda assembly room. Photo by author, 2016.

Motion 1. One proponent of maintaining the language of the motion, emphasized that PROMESA was "a divisive issue" and he could not support its "indictment" because Puerto Rican congresspeople, as well as some members of the coalition, supported the legislation. In response, another member of the coalition pointed out that the proposed language change would not indicate opposition to the larger bill, but rather would denounce the imposition of a fiscal control board. This did not sway the first man's opinion.

"Do you want to move with those that oppose PROMESA or do you want to move with everybody to fiscalize PROMESA?" he said, simultaneously raising both his voice and his arms into the air. "That's the question that you need to think about. And I'm telling you there is no healing on this. If you bring the wound back, it's going to continue. This coalition is not going to be able to move forward with language that favors in this particular case against the control board and ignores the arguments of those that supported PROMESA for the reasons of the tradeoff."

The wound he was referring to was the rift between Puerto Ricans who believed that *la junta* was a "tradeoff" for being able to restructure Puerto Rico's debt, and others, like many in the room that believed we could not talk about decolonization when "outsiders" were controlling the future of the archipelago.

The conversation escalated when an older man in the audience spoke about the personal effects of the fiscal crisis and PROMESA on his life:

> *Yo tengo una finquita en Puerto Rico y estoy allá todo el tiempo y a mi ya me afectó. Ya me subieron la luz y el agua y van a subirme, la PROMESA me va a subir los taxes y todo. No puedo vender porque eso está barato ya. La gente si decía, ya no lo dice, "Si, que venga los americanos arreglar esto, porque esto está chavao porque estos pillos se roban todo." Esa deuda no es del pueblo. Esa deuda la cogieron prestao ellos. Que la paguen ellos. Porque la gente creía que la junta, la estabilización fiscal iba ir allá hacer una auditoría de porque vino esa deuda, porque había que pagarla, y meter preso a todos lo que se robaron el dinero ... Yo, a nombre de los de allá, porque yo tengo propiedad y pago contribuciones allá a pesar que ha vivido acá 45 años, estoy si a favor de que se cambie eso, porque los que fueron a Washington a pelear primero en contra de PROMESA y cuando vino lo último, yo los vi por televición, "Si, si," después que se cansaron allá de pelear, yo creo que it wasn't a tradeoff, they were traitors.*
>
> I have a small farm in Puerto Rico and I'm there all the time and it has already affected me. They've already raised the electricity and water and PROMESA is going to raise taxes and everything. I can't sell because it's already cheap. People did say, they don't say it anymore, "Yes, let the Americans come to fix this, because this is messed up because these thieves steal everything." That debt does not belong to the people. They borrowed that debt. Let them pay it. Because the people believed that the board would go there to do an audit of where the debt came from, because the debt has to be paid, and put all

> those who stole money in prison... I, on behalf of those from over there, because I have property and I pay taxes there, even though I have lived here 45 years, I am in favor of changing the motion because those who went to Washington to fight first against PROMESA and when the time came, I watched them on TV, "Yes, yes," after they got tired of fighting. I think it wasn't a tradeoff, they were traitors

While there was some applause in the room, others were upset by what they believed was a "*falta de respeto*" (lack of respect) by calling Puerto Rican representatives in Congress traitors. After an exhausting afternoon of debate, the motion was eventually revised to read:

> The NPRA opposes the imposition of a financial control board that is not representative of Puerto Rican people and recognizes the gravity of the potential effects of PROMESA on Puerto Rico's socio-economic development and calls for the implementation of a plan of action to advocate for the interests of the Puerto Rican people that includes: the creation of a specialized policy chapter of the NPRA in Washington, D.C., that will serve as an advocacy watchdog representing the NPRA members on matters in the capitol and coordination with other NPRA members' educational and action campaigns to activate all members of our network on relevant and urgent policy issues.

When I got back to the motel room I shared with Juanita, I jotted down some quick notes on the day's events. Among them, I wrote:

> Chair was a woman – was there *machismo?* She was strong and well-spoken, no-nonsense. Although I didn't agree with everything she said, I felt like some of the opposition to her was rough. (Fieldnotes, July 24, 2016)

There were several times throughout the meeting when frustrations over motions, especially Motion 1, were directed at the chair of the assembly. I wondered what role gender played in the events of the assembly. In most cases, I observed that it was men who took a combative tone against each other and the chair. I was reminded of these initial observations in later conversations with women activists, who reflected on their gendered experiences within grassroots, non-profit, and political organizing, particularly through their interactions with Puerto Rican and Latinx men (see Chapter 3).

The creation of a National Puerto Agenda sheds light on the heterogeneity of the Puerto Rican diasporic population. As Silver (2015) argues through an analysis of cultural representations in Central Florida, there are tensions at play "between the political appeal to 'sameness' as a basis for collective action and the reality of difference" (376). In this case, "the reality of difference" can be seen not in the rifts between island-born and diaspora-born Puerto Ricans, but rather through the various stances on PROMESA and larger issues of decolonization. It is a reminder, as I will explore at greater length in the chapter that follows, that a homogenous rendering of *Puertorriqueñidad* can be counterproductive to activist practice.

But Puerto Ricans in Orlando and across the diaspora are trying to find ways to work together, whether by bringing activists and other leaders together to have these difficult conversations or by avoiding taking a stance on decolonization altogether. Between tense moments, there is also salsa dancing in front of City Hall and "anthropologizing," as Juanita put it, about our ability to be perfectly content eating *arroz con gandules* (stewed rice and pigeon peas) at every meal (which we actually did throughout the entire trip). These political and cultural ties gesture towards the possibilities of maintaining solidarity through difference, despite the arduous task of movement building.

The Fractals of Austerity

But austerity encompasses more than just a set of economic and political policies. As Rakopoulos (2018) argues, austerity is also a "dogma that aims to change social formations and re-evaluate the worth of people's lives" (2). Like abuse, it is as an intimate force that has the power to transform the lives of Puerto Ricans both in Puerto Rico and in the diaspora to Central Florida. There is a rich body of scholarship on the topic of intimacy and empire, however, with

particular regard to the domains of sexuality, desire, marriage, reproduction, and family (Attwood 2006; Giddens 1992; Shah 2011; Stoler 2006, 2002; Weeks 1998). Yet other scholars have also used the framework of intimacy to engage in a critique of the state and enactment of policies that affect social life in the contemporary neoliberal moment (Berlant 1997; Lowe 2015; Povinelli 2006, 2002). Following Lowe (2006), who defines "intimacy as proximity or adjacent connection" (193), in the following section, I consider how these entanglements of empire and austerity shape distances and proximities through forms of emotional and corporal displacement. As the anthropological literature on austerity has demonstrated, ethnography is especially well suited to capture these intimacies and the ways that everyday life is transformed in times of economic insecurity (Allison 2013; Bear 2015; Knight and Stewart 2016; Powers and Rakopoulos 2019).

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When I arrived at the Art Gallery at Mills, I was welcomed by the curator and the unofficial "mascot," a friendly dachshund named "Lump." The exhibit "*La Diaspora*," which ran from September 8 to November 6, 2016, featured the work of Puerto Rican artists known collectively as the "Puerto Rican Arts Diaspora Orlando." The group emerged, in part, from frustrations over the relegation of Puerto Rican artists in Orlando to folk festival spaces, rather than fine art galleries. The collective, which included artists who had migrated from Puerto Rico to Central Florida (Pedro Brull, Dennise Berlingeri, Yasir Nieves, Carmen Rojas, Angel Rivera, and Jose Sanchez), as well as New York-born or raised artists (José Feliciano, Felipe Morales, and María Ramos), came together in 2015 to create the traveling exhibit and insert Puerto Rican artists in the fine arts scene of Central Florida.

After a quick tour of the gallery, I met Angel Rivera, one of the featured artists. Angel was from Caimito, a municipality in San Juan. Upon finishing his bachelor's degree, he made the decision to leave Puerto Rico due to the worsening economic crisis, arriving in Orlando ahead of his wife and children. At the suggestion of a professor, Angel connected with Pedro Brull, a well-known artist living in Central Florida who would go on to found the collective. As he guided me through the exhibit - a combination of paintings and sculptures – Angel told me that art was a *testimonio*, a testimony of the artist's experiences.

"What is your testimony in your art?" I asked him.

"My painting is more than an abstract expression, it's a little bit surrealistic," said Angel. "I use the technique of abstract art to talk about themes like landscape, the emotions of human beings, the people who make up those landscapes, people close to you who sometimes when you're in a certain place remind you of someone. How the environment sometimes takes us back to other times and other places or other experiences in our lives. How you sometimes are walking on the street and all of a sudden you look at the sky and something reminds you of a loved one. So my process seeks to rescue within painting and expression all of that experience."

I thought about the things that kept my interlocutors tethered to a place, a person, or perhaps an object or idea – about how the art in that gallery captured and circulated these experiences. Angel went on to explain that his art work had changed since arriving in Orlando from Puerto Rico. It was no longer comprised of the vibrant hues of yellow, red, and orange. Instead, the "palette is calmed," muted with "softer colors, grayer colors." The "motivation," he explained, had changed:

> When you're there you're living certain stresses. I have two small children. I'm a father starting my career, you have a lot of aspirations, but at the same time...I grew up in a very beautiful place but it's affected by social problems. So the manner in which you work on the art is like an unloading. You're creating, but you have all these ideas in your head of

> things you want to achieve. At the same time, we are also experiencing a variety of situations that provoke you to make some type of catharsis at the time of painting. But when you arrived here, all of that changes because around you, the atmosphere slows down. It's a calmer area, but at the same time it signifies bigger challenges. It requires more meditation, more planning, and that also affects the work of art.

Stewart (2011) argues, "An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves…It is an attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things" (452). Angel's art was an attunement to his changing reality, to the ways that migration is also experienced and lived through.

We stopped in front of one his paintings. I could not help but notice the way the light reflected off the beautifully geometric angles.

"Can you tell me a little bit about this piece?" I asked.

"Well this piece is called, "*Pedazos de una Isla Abandonada*" (Pieces of an Deserted Island). Many of the pieces that I've been working on the past few years had the sensation of what is called fractals. It's this breaking of lights, diagonals, I also work a lot with texture, using a controlled accident to create organic feelings. And in this piece you can see that. You see the brokenness in this landscape. It's a reference to the situation which Puerto Rico finds itself in right now. We're a country who has riches, but being bankrupt we've been abandoned to our luck. And basically, although it's a piece that speaks to an aesthetic beauty, it's a contradiction. It touches upon a theme that at the same time is social, it's political. And if you look closely, you'll see some faces which represent the people who are trapped there in that life experience."

My eyes scanned the painting, looking for the faces hidden in the shadows. Trapped. Is this what an "impasse" (Berlant 2011) looks like?[33] I felt lost in the fractals that engulfed the

[33] Berlant defines an impasse as "a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic" (4). The idea of living for a here and now.

Figure 8: "Pedazos de una Isla Abandonada" (Pieces of a Deserted Island), Angel Rivera. Photo by author, 2016.

nameless people Angel painted.[34] Fractals, from the Latin for "broken." Throughout my fieldwork, I spoke with countless people who whether born on the archipelago or not, were in some way affected by austerity. I thought about the many iterations of austerity, of the ways that austerity is repeated across scales and distances that extend beyond the borders of the archipelago. These are the fractals of austerity.

Healthcare

Seated outside a Starbucks at a local strip mall, Elena, a doctor in her early 40s from Guaynabo, tells me about the changes she saw in the health care system prior to leaving Puerto Rico. She explains:

> When Medicare made the HMOs and the advantage programs - I don't know if you know about them. It's like retired patients, they get Medicare, right? They tried to subdivide it. Like instead of Medicare running everything, they gave different companies, Humana, there is no Aetna but, for example, so you can understand me, Aetna, Blue Shield. They distributed all the lives of patients that were on Medicare and it was your option to enroll in one of those programs or you could stay in the traditional one. But if you enroll in one of those programs you don't have to pay anything out of pocket…But what happens is you need authorizations for everything. So, the more they spend, the less they get. And what happens is, people don't get the services because the insurance companies want to keep everything. If a patient needs an MRI outpatient, they won't do it, because no that's a lot of money, you can get a CT scan or an x-ray of your skull. And it was ridiculous. So, what happened was that the hospitals started to get saturated because, since the insurance won't provide the service, people were going to the emergency room because they get everything done all at once…The hospital was getting saturated with things that don't need to be hospitalized. That happens here too, but over there it was triple the amount of patients…And then, the insurance companies decide if they pay or not. Like even if I saw the patient, "Oh, he didn't meet criteria to be in the hospital so we're not going to pay you"… I could see a patient in the office, if it was regular PPO Humana I'd get $20, over here it's $300. It's ridiculous. So I had to have my office, I had to see like 60 patients a day, and I had to round in my hospital. It was 24/7. It was ridiculous the way I was working.

[34] Mandelbrot (1982) defines fractals as "a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole" (34).

Approximately half of Puerto Rico's residents are dependent on federally funded health care programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, for health coverage (Medicaid.gov). There are four types of coverage available under Medicare: Part A (Hospital Insurance), Part B (Medical Insurance), Part C (Medicare Advantage), and Part D (Medicare prescription drug coverage) (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Mach 2016). What Elena describes above is Part C or Medicare Advantage, which consists of coverage provided by Medicare-approved private companies, such as Humana. In 2015, more than 70% of Medicare beneficiaries were enrolled in these types of private plans, a rate higher than any U.S. state (Mach 2016). While seemingly attractive for their lower premiums and reduced cost-sharing, the plans have lower reimbursement rates than those in the United States, which means that providers also usually get paid less in Puerto Rico.[35] According to researchers, Puerto Ricans on the archipelago who are enrolled in these types of plans receive worse care than whites or Latinxs enrolled in the same plans in the United States (Rivera-Hernandez et. al. 2016).[36]

But Puerto Rico's Medicaid program is not funded in the same way as U.S. states. States follow an open-ended financing structure, which provides a matching percentage of funds that accounts for the state's per capita income. Puerto Rico has a median household income of $19,775 and a poverty rate of 44.9 percent, the latter of which is more than double that of Mississippi (Guzman 2018). Despite this and the fact that Puerto Ricans pay federal taxes, Puerto Rico receives a fixed block grant each year to cover expenditures (Mach 2016). Once the funds are depleted, Puerto Rico is responsible for any remaining health care costs. If the funding cap

[35] The Affordable Care Act has also led to cuts in the Medicare Advantage system in Puerto Rico.

[36] Quality of care was determined by a number of measures pertaining to treatment in diabetes care, cardiovascular disease, cancer screening, and appropriate drug use (Rivera-Hernandez et. al. 2016).

were lifted and Puerto Rico followed a similar formula to U.S. states, the federal government would be responsible for 83 percent of Medicaid expenditures (Perreira et. al. 2017). Instead, the Puerto Rican government has been forced to borrow money in order to sustain the Medicaid program, exacerbating the archipelago's debt and contributing to the looming threat of loss of coverage for hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans.

A combination of these factors has led to overcrowding, long waits in hospital emergency rooms, decreased quality of care, and the exodus of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals (Department of Health and Human Services 2017; Perreira et. al. 2017). Between 2006 and 2016, an estimated 5,000 doctors have left Puerto Rico (Duany 2017). Elena was one of those doctors, who after years of working long hours split between the hospital and her office, decided that something had to change.

"I wasn't seeing my family. I'm like ok, I'm going to end up divorced. My daughters are not going to want to see me," she told me, as her youngest daughter sat beside her at the table drawing a picture. "I could not do it. What made me move was one night I was doing my call weekend. We were three of us, so every three weeks, I was off…That weekend that I was working, I had to take call from the hospital and I could round, because we were three doctors, two hospitals, I could see maybe 75 patients in a day. I didn't have time."

That night, Elena was driving home and took a call from her husband who told her that her that her children were already fast asleep.

"I got so happy," Elena recalled, "'*Ay, que bueno que estan durmiendo*' (Oh, how good that they're asleep). And that, oh my goodness, I started crying. Ok, I have to do something because I cannot say that I'm happy that I'm not going to see my girls."

When a headhunter from Orlando called to see if she would be interested in a position at a local hospital in Orlando, she agreed to an interview and was hired shortly after. Elena closed and sold her practice in Puerto Rico, in 2012, moving to Orlando with her husband and three daughters.

Some scholars have noted that Puerto Rican migration to Florida has been characterized by a greater presence of middle-class migrants with higher income, rates of home ownership, and occupational status than earlier working-class migrants to cities such as New York and Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s (Collazo et. al. 2010; Duany 2010, 2011; Villarrubia-Mendoza 2007; Whalen 2005).[37] However, this is more a result of an increase in educational attainment and occupational status on the archipelago, than it is evidence of a so-called "brain drain," as it has been depicted by the media (Duany 2017). On the contrary, the diversity of class composition, education, and occupational status of Puerto Ricans migrating to Central Florida suggests the far-reaching effects of austerity. However, while austerity cuts across class, gender, racial, and other social locations, it does not do so evenly. This is evident in Elena's suggested solution for the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico:

> The government, they just have to shrink it. It's too many people. Half of the archipelago is government employed. How can you run the economics of a country if half of the people work for the government? Whatever you collect, you have to pay in *salario* (salary) and benefits for the people. It should be shrinked.

While affected by the consequences of uneven health care funding in both her professional and personal life, Elena subscribed to the "culture of liquidity" (Ho 2009) that has become part and

[37] As scholars have noted, class is a particularly fluid category, mediated by a number of factors, such as income, social relationships, race, and gender (Joyce 1995; Ortner 2003).

parcel of austere times.[38] Her narrative speaks to the sometimes-contradictory effects of austerity on migrant subjectivities and how they are mediated by factors, such as class.

Anxiety

For others, who had migrated to Florida years before Puerto Rico first defaulted on its debt, the effects of austerity are felt across physical distances or "emotional bridges" (Aranda 2007). Yvette, who cannot afford the regular trip back to Puerto Rico to visit her brother, sisters, and other family members who remain on the archipelago, maintains regular telephone contact. Just a few months earlier, Yvette's niece, who was previously attending a school with a focus on athletics in Puerto Rico, arrived in Orlando to live with her until she finished high school. Yvette explained the importance of these ties:

> The connection now with the younger generation talking to me about Puerto Rico and what she lost since she came. It touches me. You know my sister talks to me a lot about what is happening in the neighborhood, my cousins talk to me a lot about what is happening in their neighborhood. So if a gallon of milk is like six or seven dollars, if a gallon of gas is five dollars, you start thinking when you go here to the store, it's always on my mind how much I'm paying here for a gallon of milk not knowing if in Puerto Rico my family there has a gallon of milk that day. To me it's painful. Knowing that my sister might have to work until she dies because she lost her retirement is painful. Knowing that there have been hospitals that are closing in sections because they cannot afford - the services are not there for people that need it. It's a humanitarian crisis. I am worried. I am very worried. So, what can I tell you? There's a lot of work to do. As a Puerto Rican woman from here, living here in the United States, we need to do better to improve our situation here but also to support Puerto Rico from here and that is the balancing act.

Yvette's concerns for her family back in Puerto Rico echoed the sentiments of many Puerto Ricans I spoke with throughout my fieldwork. As Aranda (2007) finds in her study of middle-

[38] In her ethnography of Wall Street, Karen Ho (2009) captures the everyday practices of investment bankers that enable the creation of a "culture of liquidity" marked by the normalization of downsizing, job insecurity, and volatility.

class Puerto Ricans in Florida, "even though their lives are lived locally in whichever society they are in, their emotional, intellectual, and family lives are lived transnationally" (167).

If we consider intimacy as proximity, then the intimacies of austerity are also manifest in the emotional spaces between Puerto Ricans now living in Orlando and the archipelago. Puerto Rican migration to the United States has long been defined by circulation. While these "mobile livelihoods" (Duany 2002) are marked by the flow of people, ideas, and practices between Puerto Rico and the United States, they are also marked by the circulation of affect – of feelings of worry and pain that, in many cases, have intensified over the past two decades. Perhaps "*La ansiedad de ser puertorriqueño*" (the anxiety of being Puerto Rican) has taken on new meaning in the contemporary moment of neoliberal austerity (Torrecilla 2004). While not directly affected by the rising cost of milk in the same way as her sister, Yvette's words reflect how the "breakdown of everydayness" (Allison 2013) is felt across geographic and social locations. As we will see throughout this and later chapters, these emotions are oftentimes motivating factors in the decision to "support Puerto Rico from here," through such practices as involvement in anti-austerity protests, voter registration drives (see Chapter 3), and hurricane relief efforts (see Chapter 5).

Education

A young girl named Hiromi walks into an empty room in Manati, Puerto Rico. The walls are stripped bare. There are no desks, no chairs, or any other remnants to indicate that this was once a classroom, except for the painted paper plates that Hiromi collects from the ground.

"I remember this was mine," she says, as she holds her artwork in her hands.

From a voiceover, we learn that over 150 schools have closed on the archipelago due to the fiscal crisis. Clips of Rep. Luis Gutierrez, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, and Sen. Bernie Sanders renouncing vulture funds for their role in the "suffering" of Puerto Rico's school children flash through the screen, alternating with images of empty chairs, padlocked gates, and tattered school signs.

These are scenes from "Closing Schools for Profit," one of a series of short films produced by Brave New Films called, "Preying on Puerto Rico: The Forgotten Citizens of Hedge Fund Archipelago."[39] The film singles out vulture funds like Aurelius Capital Management, which is part of a group of hedge funds known as the Ad Hoc Group of Puerto Rico, who hold nearly $5 billion of the archipelago's bonds (Morales 2019). [40] In a report commissioned by the Ad Hoc Group, economists Fajgenbaum et. al. (2015) recommend austerity measures, such as reducing the number of teachers, as well as subsidy cuts to University of Puerto Rico. Over the years, this is precisely what Puerto Rico has faced, while schools began to close in unprecedented numbers. According to a recent report by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 265 public schools have closed by the 2018-2019 school year, the majority of them elementary schools in rural areas (Hinojosa et. al. 2019).[41]

Later in the film, we hear from Hiromi's mother, Tania. She tells us that Hiromi's school closed a year ago. Hiromi does not look forward to attending her new school and, like many

[39] The film was shown at several organizational events during my fieldwork period.

[40] Auerelius Capital Management also owns debt in Greece, Detroit and Argentina.

[41] Hurricane Maria had catastrophic effects on Puerto Rico's public education system, with K-12 schools facing $142 million in damages (Brusi and Godreau 2019). The push to privatize education in the form of charter schools and an increase in out-migration were just two of the many consequences of the storm. Orange County Public Schools officials set up a table at Orlando Airport to register students and interview arriving Puerto Rican teachers (OCPS 2017).

other children, suffers from "*anxiedad*" (anxiety). She must now travel a further distance to attend one of the few remaining schools. Tania looks into the camera, as she asks why she must pay the price of the debt, if she is not the one who borrowed the money in the first place. The film goes on to also highlight other austerity measures, such as the proposed reduction of minimum wage from $7.25 to $4.25 an hour, and tuition hikes at the University of Puerto where hungry students frequent the community food bank for a hot meal.

But there are other stories not told in the film, like those of Puerto Rican teachers who must also grapple with the effects of austerity. Teachers who watch as their enrollment gradually declines, until their schools close their doors for the last time. And teachers who leave for places like Central Florida in hopes of being able to better support their families. Stories like that of Amelia, a high school English teacher in Puerto Rico, whose position was phased out when Title 1 funds were cut. She was reassigned to teach kindergartners, prompting her decision to leave for Orlando, in 2005, after visiting friends in the area.

And then there are others, like Ivan, a 17-year teaching veteran in Puerto Rico's public schools, who was told during a visit to the office of *El Sistema Retiro para Maestros* (Teachers Retirement System of Puerto Rico) that he would not be able to get the money he paid into his pension fund.[42] His case is not an anomaly. Although Puerto Rican teachers continue to pay pension contributions, pension funds are so depressed that approximately 30 percent of the $49 billion in unfunded pensions is owed to retired teachers (Walsh 2017). Ivan characterized it as an "assault," a "hit" to his career and the careers of other Puerto Ricans that have contributed to Puerto Rico "with their love, with their care, with their devotion." More recently, in 2019,

[42] Ivan spent the first 11 years of his life in New York, before moving to Luquillo, Puerto Rico in the 1970s when his father's health was declining.

Governor Wanda Vasquez approved the Fiscal Control Board's proposed plan, which would result in an 8.5 percent cut to government workers pensions (Deibert 2019). The cut would affect retirees who receive over $1200 a month, which is approximately 40% of government retirees.

Ivan and I sit at one of the tables in the lobby of the Osceola County YMCA, while his son plays basketball in a nearby indoor court. He tells me about his experience working in the Fajardo school district.

"We had 40 schools," he begins, recalling the visible effects of austerity. "The year that I left, it was 32. Today, I hear it's not even 25. Let me just throw some numbers at you. In Fajardo, there are two junior high schools, urban, in town. I worked in one for nine years. In the heyday of that school there were 962 students. The year that I left there were 231. Today, it's closed and all the students are in the other school."

Before he left Puerto Rico, Ivan visited one of the K-6 schools in the mountainside. He was shaken to find that enrollment had dropped to just 15 students. That day, Ivan went into the school bathroom to cry after the teacher appealed to him for advice on how best to help the remaining students. Shortly after, in 2014, Ivan decided to make the move from an *urbanización* (urbanization) in Fajardo to Kissimmee with his wife and youngest of two sons. But the transition was far from easy. Although he secured a position as a teacher in a local high school prior to his arrival, he only had $150 in his pocket when his plane landed. He rented a room in a mobile home, until one day during his long commute down Highway 192 to work, he noticed something strange.

"I noticed people going into the hotels and I said one day, let me check this out," he explained. "I went into a hotel, I said, 'Listen, I'm a teacher, blah, blah, blah. I live in this room.

I've noticed people coming here, I don't believe they're tourists. Can I stay here for a week, two weeks, a month?' And they said, 'Yes, of course.'"

After learning that it would cost $250 a week or $1000 a month, Ivan began to do the math. "That's a lot of money. So then I took what I knew I was going to make. I hadn't gotten paid yet, but I knew more or less what my net was going to be, which was more than enough."

The first weekend he got paid, Ivan and his family moved into the hotel – one of several in which they would spend the next four months living. U.S. Route 192 is known as the tourist corridor. It is the road that leads to Disney, the place "where dreams come true." But behind the walls of the motels and hotels that line the corridor lies hidden the realities of homelessness. Florida was hit especially hard by the burst of the housing bubble, which began in 2007 and led to increased homelessness and unemployment in the state (Hurd and Rohwedder 2010). Because of the dearth of shelters and affordable housing, families who could afford the nightly or weekly rates began turning to motels as an alternative to the street (Santich 2015). While the recession may have "officially" ended in the United States, Puerto Rican migrants are increasingly turning to these motels as they flee worsening economic and social conditions on the archipelago.[43]

Iniciativa took note of the growing number of Puerto Rican teachers arriving in Orange and Osceola counties, starting a new initiative in 2016 called, *Maestros Puertorriquenos en Accion* (Puerto Rican Teachers in Action). I met with Sonia, a retired teacher and union organizer who directed the initiative, in her home in Southwest Orlando.[44] The initial purpose of

[43] Many of these hotels and motels were part of FEMA's approved list for Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) vouchers following Hurricane Maria.

[44] Born to a white mother and Puerto Rican father in New York, Sonia spent much of her childhood living in Puerto Rico, New Jersey, and New Mexico, and moved to Miami from Puerto Rico, in 2006, before retiring in Orlando in 2014. While her vocation as a teacher and

the group, she explained to me, was to "create a nucleus of activists who were to encourage their high school students to register to vote, [and] to talk to their parents about the importance to vote." The focus, however, shifted as organizers realized the need to create a network of support and a "safe haven" for (under)employed and unemployed Puerto Rican teachers now living in Central Florida.

I attended the organization's first meeting on July 29, 2016, on the premises of a Christian Church in Kissimmee. As I took a seat at the one of the long rectangular tables that were pushed together in a U-formation, I noticed that all but two of the thirty attendees were women, a pattern I would again observe at later meetings. I thought about the ways that austerity is also gendered. In Puerto Rico, as in many other parts of the world, teaching has historically been a gendered profession, with more women entering the field in the 1920s (del Moral 2013; Matos-Rodriguez and Delgado 2015).

After a brief introduction by Jorge and Sonia, Sonia introduced Juanita, a well-known teacher in Orange County who was instrumental in establishing the group by helping Sonia create a more focused agenda and establishing an online presence through Facebook. Juanita stood up and addressed the room:

> *Hoy estoy aquí por una preocupación que me destroza mi corazón y es ver a mis compañeros maestros ejecutando empleo que no pertenecen a su preparación. El condado de Orange se compone de 37% hispanos y 32% anglo-saxones. Siendo nosotros los latinos la mayoría, cómo es posible que cuando nuestra certificación de Puerto Rico puede ser transferible a la de la Florida, todavía confrontamos obstáculos para lograr de hecho fin? La capacidad indiscutible de los profesionales puertorriqueños queda demostrado al través del mundo. Y aun cuando entiendo que la discriminación y estereotipos pueden influir en la obstaculización de nuestras metas profesionales, creo firmemente que los temores por las barreras lingüísticas y el desconocimiento del nuevo sistema educativo son las mayores causas que no recibir el empleo deseado…Cómo es posible que después que hemos logrados un empleo de maestros, no nos comprometemos*

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union organizer brought her to several parts of the United States and Puerto Rico, her "soul," Sonia told me, "was always Puerto Rican."

> *ayudar ni orientar a esos maestros que todavía estan desempleados o empleados en compañías que no tienen nada que ver con la educación. Me duele ver resumes en el olvido de maestros puertorriqueño altamente cualificado, y aquí yo sé que hay muchos, verdad? Le doy las gracias a la educación publica puertorriqueñia que me instruyo para ejercer mi profesión dentro y fuera de Puerto Rico. Estamos capacitados para ejecutar la profesión de maestros en la Florida y si hoy no los están haciendo tenemos que identificar las alternativas que tenemos para lograr...Y como decía Celia, my English is not very good looking, pero como siempre digo, my accent is an asset.*
>
> I am here today because of a concern that destroys my heart, and that is seeing my fellow teachers in jobs that do not pertain to their preparation. Orange county is comprised of 37% Hispanics and 325 Anglo-Saxons. With us Latinos being the majority, how is it possible that when our certification from Puerto Rico is transferable to Florida, that we still confront obstacles. The undisputed capacity of Puerto Rican professionals is demonstrated throughout the world. And even when I understand that discrimination and stereotypes can influence the obstruction of our professional goals, I strongly believe that fears about language barriers and ignorance of the new education system are the biggest causes of not receiving the desired job ... How is it possible that after we have obtained a teaching job, we are not committed to helping or guiding those teachers who are still unemployed or employed in companies that have nothing to do with education. It hurts me to see the resumes of highly qualified Puerto Rican teachers, and I know there are many here, right? I thank Puerto Rican public education, which taught me to practice my profession in and outside of Puerto Rico. We are capable of doing the job of teaching in Florida and if today we are not, we need to identify the alternatives to achieve that end goal ... And as Celia said, my English is not very good looking, but as I always say, my accent is an asset.

Juanita points to the obstacles that many teachers face when they arrive from Puerto Rico. As she spoke, several teachers nodded in agreement, confiding in those around the table about their confusion regarding district requirements and educational jargon. Others were discouraged over their perennial status as a substitute, or being told by their students that they could not understand their accent.

Despite the shortage of teachers in Central Florida and the "Interstate Agreement" between Florida and Puerto Rico which allows for reciprocity of teaching licenses granted that teachers meet certain state requirements (NASDTEC 2015), many Puerto Rican teachers do not

readily find employment as educators as did Amelia and Ivan.[45] Faced with the obstacles of language, the high cost of exams, and an unfamiliar educational system, many Puerto Rican teachers in Orange and Osceola counties remain unemployed or employed in positions that have little to nothing to do with their expertise or educational level. I thought back to a conversation with a recently arrived Puerto Rican woman I met at a local restaurant in my first months of fieldwork. She shared with me that as a teacher in Puerto Rico she only made about $28,000, barely enough to support her family. When she arrived in Orlando with her husband and five-year-old son, she took a position as an assistant to a physical education teacher because her command of English was not strong enough to obtain an instructional position.

Juanita herself, although not a teacher in Puerto Rico, had attained a master's degree in Higher Education. Upon moving to Orlando in 1998 with her four children, she began work at a local car wash and Taco Bell, later finding a pathway into education by becoming a volunteer at a public high school. Since then, she has gone on to win multiple prestigious awards and accolades for her work with Latinx and other underrepresented students.[46] When I debriefed with Juanita about the meeting during a later interview, she emphasized the need for more research into the reasons why Puerto Rican teachers were unemployed in order to formulate long-term solutions. She proposed an "adopt a teacher" form of mentorship, where employed teachers would take unemployed teachers under their wing to familiarize them with the school system.

[45] The Florida Department of Education identified teacher shortages in the areas of Science-General, English, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Technical Education, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Mathematics, Reading, and Science-Physical (see Florida Department of Education 2019). In 2018, the school system needed to fill over 2000 vacancies statewide.

[46] In 2018, Juanita led and won a student-run campaign for a seat on the school board.

"*Si usted no esta adentro*" (if you're not on the inside), Juanita said, *"no pueden cambiar nada*" (there's nothing you can change).

Her words echo not only a personal responsibility to help other Puerto Rican teachers succeed now that she is on the inside, but also a common motivating factor in the push for better Puerto Rican institutional representation.[47]

"Breaking the Chains" of Austerity

It was March 22, 2017, the 144th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico. I put on my *Vamos4PR* t-shirt and headed to downtown Kissimmee, ready for another afternoon of protest. *Vamos4PR*, a national organization committed to mobilizing the diaspora around issues relating to the Puerto Rican debt crisis, had called a "National Day of Action." The goal, according to their website, was to "demand that Puerto Rico's decision-makers defend the interests of the people, not of the banks that created this crisis" (Vamos4PR 2017). Coordinating protests were held in cities across the United States, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Hartford, Seattle, and Kissimmee. When I arrived, there was a growing crowd of over forty people in the parking lot. Members of *Vamos,* joined by other organizations like *Iniciativa, Misión Boricua*, and Organize Now, held signs demanding an audit of Puerto Rico's debt.

We gathered behind the banner, held up by four people, that read: "Banks > People? Hands off Puerto Rico." With the rallying cries of "*aqui estamos, no nos vamos, y si nos hechan, regresamos*" (we're here, we will not leave, and if you kick us out, we will return), we began the short march to the local office of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA).

[47] See Chapter 3.

Figure 9: Protesters hold a sign in Kissimmee denouncing the role of banks in Puerto Rico's debt. Photo by author, 2017.

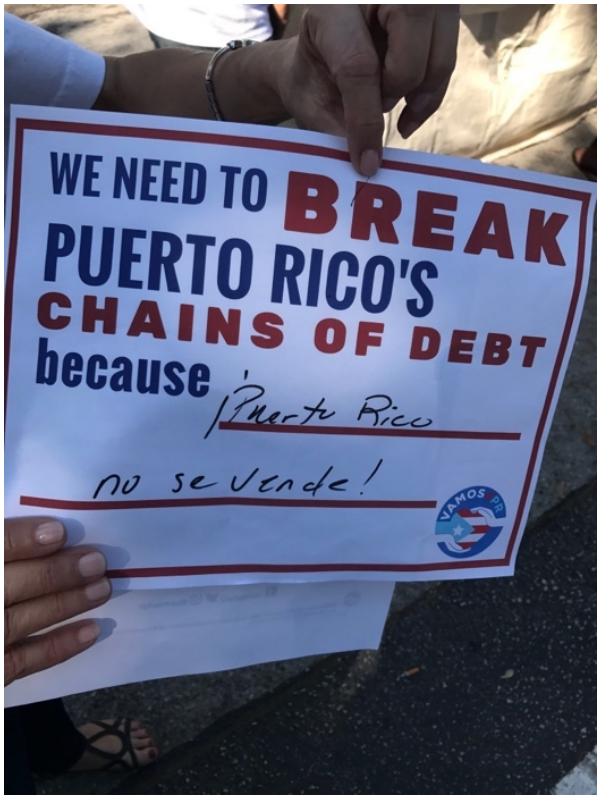

Figure 10: Protester hold a sign that reads: "We need to break Puerto Rico's chain of debt because Puerto Rico *no se vende.*" Photo by author, 2017.

Figure 11: Protester holds poster with the image of a vulture with Puerto Rico's debt in its talons. Photo by author, 2017.

There, under the shadows of the United States and Puerto Rican flags, several activists came forward to tell their stories, including Yvette, whose words were carried by the megaphone:

> Right now, Puerto Rico stands at the edge of a precipice. The fate of the economy is being decided by a financial oversight board, an unelected body set up by Congress in 2016 that has been carrying out its business away from the public eye and in the heart of Wall Street far from people most affected by their decisions.

Amidst the boos for Wall Street from the crowd, Yvette detailed how "Puerto Ricans have suffered greatly in the past decade" and calling for the reinstatement of the recently disbanded independent citizens audit commission. The commission was originally established under Gov. Garcia Padilla to direct a public audit of the debt, but it was eliminated under Gov. Rosello in April 2017 (Morales 2019; Prados-Rodrigues 2019).[48] The demands for an audit represent calls for transparency and accountability that reverberate across Puerto Rico and its diaspora. I was surprised to see the director of PRFAA peak out from the doorway. It was a brief appearance. I could barely make out his face, as he told us from the doorway that we were welcomed to schedule an appointment to speak with him at a later time. As he retreated, the crowd resumed their cries: "*Auditoría ya*" (Audit now)!

But perhaps most memorable, were the words or Yvette's teenage niece, who moved in with her that summer because her parents in Puerto Rico could no longer afford to care for her:

> The debt is taking away my parents. The debt is getting my parents to work 10 hours a day, every day. I'd see my parents in the morning when they'd make breakfast for me and, until the next morning, I never saw them again. This is substantial for a teenager, any student that needs their parents and I couldn't have that…There is something that has to be fixed. Why would we pay it [debt], if we haven't taken anything?...Why are

[48] As a result of the commission's elimination, Puerto Ricans on the archipelago organized the Frente Ciudadano por la Auditoria de la Deuda (Citizen's Front to Audit the Debt), "a non-profit organization whose only purpose is to perform a transparent and comprehensive citizen audit of Puerto Rico's debt issuances for the past five decades" (Prados-Rodrigues 2019)

> generations like mine and the ones that come after me having to pay for all that money that's not even ours?

As the young woman's words indicate, as a result of austerity measures, Puerto Ricans are being forced to repay a debt that is effectively not theirs through the currency of forced migration, altered relationships, and the transformation of everyday life. Her questions call to mind concerns over the legality of Puerto Rico's debt that have been raised by activists and legal scholars alike. According to Bannan (2016), who considers the odiousness of Puerto Rico's debt with the context of United States colonialism, "debt repayment can become illegitimate when it prevents a state from fulfilling its human rights obligations" (297).[49] Puerto Rico has neither benefited from its debt, nor its relationship with its colonizer. The latter is evidenced by the inability of Puerto Rico to legally restructure its own debt or file for Chapter 9 bankruptcy (Bannan 2016).

Conclusion

In organizing and telling their stories, Puerto Rican activists make public the intimacies of austerity – intimacies that are manifest through art, healthcare, education, and moments of anxiety. These fragments of colonial neoliberalism are reproduced and sustained through U.S. policies like PROMESA, as well as the continued enactment of austerity measures. Ultimately, the reoccurring discourse of abuse moves us beyond the barest definition of austerity as a set of political-economic policies. Austerity moves bodies – some away from the archipelago and others towards the work of social justice. It also takes on an affective existence that is felt throughout the contours of everyday life. Austerity kills, as was reaffirmed once again through

[49] Bannan (2016) invokes the doctrine of odious debt, a legal theory that purports "that debt accumulated by an odious regime that burdens, rather than benefits, the people of that nation should not be repaid" (288).

the (un)natural disaster of Hurricane Maria (see Chapter 5). The narratives in this chapter are part of the fractals of austerity, fractals that scale across the Atlantic Ocean into Orlando, where many activists are not only joining the fight against austerity, but are also engaged in the act of placemaking. In the next chapter I explore the latter, moving away from gender as metaphor and towards gender as politics.

CHAPTER 3

"POLITICS IN RICE AND BEANS":

PUERTO RICAN WOMEN'S ELECTORAL AND PARTICIPATORY POLITICS

> I noticed during the presentation that S was upset and was raising her hand to speak but the panel did not allow any audience questions, which I thought was strange. Why invite an audience if the politicians (all men) were the only ones to ask questions of the panel of academics (all men)? After the panel ended, I asked S what she thought of the panel and she said she was "pissed." First, she pointed out that in a state with 60% Puerto Rican women (which was a point made during the presentation), they could not find one woman to be on the panel. She also was trying to interject that she was actually going to be doing a training/presentation to business people precisely related to a point that Martinez-Fernandez made about "mainstream" big business not hiring Latinxs. She wanted to let them know that things were happening in the community.
>
> - *Field notes, Monday, February 3, 2017*

I am seated outside a Starbucks with Cecilia, who has been living in Orlando for three years. Born in California to a Mexican father and a Puerto Rican mother, she spent most of her childhood growing up on a coffee farm in Lares, Puerto Rico after her mother remarried in the 1970s. She lived there until 2009, when she moved to Texas to take a job in labor organizing. Since moving to Orlando, Cecilia devoted her time to voter registration efforts and involvement with local organizations, such as *Iniciativa.* She had previously managed two political

campaigns, one in Puerto Rico and the other in Orlando. Cecilia recalled the latter experience working with a Latino man who was running for a local district commissioner seat.

"The people that were around us were women. *Los hombres no se mezclan* (They don't get mixed up in it). *Los hombres deciden quien va postularse* (They pick out the person). You are going to be the one but it's women who basically manage all the stuff…We are more like, *ay lo voy hacer porque es una buena persona, creo que puede hacer algo* (I'll do it because he is a good person, I think that he can do something). *Le voy a dar el tiempo que me sobre.* (I'll give him my spare time.) And that is what people do. When they have that off time, then they get involved, because it's door knocking, it's being at an event putting on a table, giving flyers," she says as she takes a sip of her coffee.

"So it's a lot of women and if you go to places here, different meetings, and you might have that experience, *son las mujeres que están siempre allí* (it's the women who are always there)."

"I've noticed in different events in the community, the panels are all men and then you look at the audience and it's all women," I respond.

"That's the thing. We are allowed to do certain things, *como te dije, pero es el trabajo duro, es el trabajo de la calle* (like I told you, but it is the hard work, the street work). *El trabajo duro es* (the hard work is) knocking on doors, doing phone banks, *pero* (but) that's again when we want to do the other stuff because we, a lot of us, are prepared to do the other stuff - no, you are not allowed to jump in that wagon. *Y eso ha sido mi batalla aquí* (And that has been my battle here)."

In this conversation, Cecilia positions women as "caretakers" who do the "hard work" of knocking on doors or making phone calls, while men are squarely in the "public" eye making

major decisions. Other Puerto Rican women reported similar observations, like the scene captured in the excerpt from my fieldnotes above. “Panels of experts” were oftentimes overwhelmingly Latinos, despite the expertise and long-time political involvement of the Puerto Rican women in the crowd and in the community. In this chapter, I center the political lives of Puerto Rican women of various class backgrounds, who like Cecilia, have taken to the streets to register voters, knock on doors, and run political campaigns. Through their perspectives, I tell the story of politics in the Orlando-Kissimmee area. Ultimately, I argue that while categories of the domestic still, in many ways, permeate gendered expectations of women’s political work, Puerto Rican women refuse to be relegated to the background.[50] Instead, they are deeply involved in public forms of placemaking that demonstrate the intertwined nature of power and participation.[51]

Beyond the Latino Vote

What emerges as a fairly predictable pattern, “with each presidential election, the media and the punditocracy discover Latinos anew” (DeSipio and de la Garza 2002, 398). The 2016 election proved no exception, as the preoccupation with the “Latino vote” once again captured

[50] Michelle Rosaldo (1974) defined the domestic as “those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children,” and the public as the "activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups” (23). The idea of these social spheres as distinct has since been widely critiqued by legal and feminist scholars alike (Landes 1998; MacKinnon 1987; Pateman 1989; Stephen 1991, 1997). However, others, such as Lugo and Maurer (2000), maintain that such categories of Victorian thought have not altogether been transcended.

[51] Following Perez (2004), I take place making to mean “the dynamic process whereby local meanings, identities, and spaces are socially constructed within the hierarchies of power and difference operating at both a local and a global scale” (95).

the national imaginary.[52] A quick scan of electronic news media in the months leading up to the election reveal headlines touting the power of the Latino voting bloc: “This is the year of the Latino vote” (Lind 2016) and “Latino vote: Will the sleeping giant finally choose the next president?" (Hurtado and Martinez 2016). In Florida, what continues to be a key battleground state, Latinxs were projected to represent 18 percent of the vote (Pew 2016). Moreover, with the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico contributing to the growth of the Latinx population in the state, Puerto Ricans have become a central focus of the “sleeping giant” metaphor.[53]

As a result of the “(re)discovery” of Latinos every 2-4 years, a revolving door of political candidates and organizations swept through Central Florida – a cause of frustration for several Puerto Rican activists, including Nilda, a Puerto Rican from New York, who had worked several campaigns since arriving in Central Florida.

“How is it possible that you have 50-something percent Hispanic population and there are no Hispanics sitting on the county commission?” she put it quite bluntly. “No Hispanics sitting on the school board. There are no Hispanics at the state level hierarchy. And I'm like something has got to give. And don’t think about us as an afterthought every time there’s a damn election because now we have to bring out the Hispanic vote.”

For Nilda and others I spoke with, the “Hispanic vote” was not just a specter of opportunity that reared its head before each election cycle, but rather part and parcel of an ongoing struggle for political representation and long-term solutions to issues facing their community. Furthermore, the idea of the “Latino Vote” is in and of itself homogenizing. As

[52] The “sleeping giant” trope has been around for decades and suggests the potential of the Latinx electorate.

[53] Although not allowed to vote for president in Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans are eligible to vote in presidential elections upon residence in United States.

Beltran (2010) argues through an analysis of the Puerto Rican and Chicanx movements of the 1960s, although "the mass media and other political elites often portray Latinos as a collective body with common interests, the actual existence of Latino unity—of a collective political consciousness and will distinct among Latinos—is far less certain" (6). As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, the notion of a shared political consciousness among both Latinxs and Puerto Ricans is fragmented at best and counterproductive at worst. Thus, this chapter moves beyond the "Latino Vote," focusing instead on electoral power, rather than the public fascination with electoral presence.

The Spaces of Politics

> Women worked; women were wives and mothers; women were involved.
>
> - Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*

It is with these words that Sánchez Korrol (1994) ends the fourth chapter of her groundbreaking book, *From Colonia to Community*. Originally published in 1983, the chapter underscores the instrumental roles that women played in the building of community in New York during the first half of the twentieth century. Since then, the field of Puerto Rican studies has expanded to include attention to Puerto Rican women's lives and agency when it comes to experiences, such as migration, labor, education, and reproductive rights (Acosta-Belén 1986; Matos-Rodriguez and Delgado 1998; Toro-Morn and Garcia Zambrano; Whalen 2001). This

scholarship has resisted "culture of poverty" narratives that pathologize poor Puerto Ricans and women, in particular. It has also contributed to our understanding of women's political participation. For instance, Benmayor et. al.'s (1997) study of New York's El Barrio Project demonstrates the various ways that Puerto Rican women claim rights and public space – from preparing food for student strikers and writing letters, to demanding to be seen at a government office.

In a similar vein, feminist and Chicanx Studies scholars have also broadened definitions of Latina political participation. For instance, Ruiz's (1998) *From Out of the Shadows*, shows how Mexican women effectively created community and claimed public space for both their communities and themselves, not only through their roles on the picket line, but also in other venues, such as churches, neighborhoods, community organizations, and development projects. Pardo's (1998) study of Chicana activism in East Los Angeles, also moves us beyond inadequate definitions of political activism that are limited to electoral politics. Through the life histories of activists involved the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), Pardo demonstrates the ways that activism is framed by her narrators as part and parcel of their familial responsibilities. These studies explicate the importance of locally situated knowledges that link activist projects to other concerns in Latinas lives, such as education and immigration (Zavella 2017).

In the following sections, I move away from the tendency to view politics neatly as either representational or grassroots, and towards a more dialectic model that recognizes the overlap of these two spheres in the efforts to mobilize voters (García Bedolla 2005; Siera and Sosa-Riddell 1994; Takash 1993).[54]

[54] I refer to mobilization as "the process by which candidates, parties, activists and groups induce other people to participate" (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 25).

At the Dinner Table

> If it affects me at the dinner table, it's politics in rice and beans."
>
> - Yvette

During Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, Yvette called voters and knocked on strangers' doors with her ten-year old son trailing behind her. The campaign taught her "about government and what it meant to vote and the power of that vote." It also helped shape her philosophy of politics in "rice and beans terms."

"If you're dumping stuff in the water, the same water that you are going to process to drink from and give to the people, what do you think is going to happen? If you don't protect that and we don't have water to survive, what is going to happen?" Yvette continued to explain as she looked up from her kitchen table. "Every 10 years there is a census. They count the population. If we don't send the census forms back so we are counted that affects how they set up the district lines. That affects how certain services can be brought in because you also have to state your economic status and that affects future…*Para mi eso es politica en rice and beans terms, porque todos esos factores afectan los servicios que nosotros recibimos en nuestra comunidad y como nosotros nos vemos representado en los números* (For me, that's politics in rice and beans terms, because all those factors affect the services that we receive in our community and the way we see ourselves represented in the numbers)."

Yvette's framing of politics in "rice and beans terms" emphasizes how politics affects Puerto Ricans and Latinxs on a quotidian level through issues, such as access to clean water, and

services, such as healthcare and education. Later, Yvette recalled what she described as “fighting for claiming the neighborhood,” her response to increased congestion, traffic accidents, crime, and a lack of proper lighting in the community. When she learned about the upcoming construction of a new development in her neighborhood, she knocked on her neighbors’ doors to collect signatures and spoke against the development at community meetings.

“So how do you feel as a Puerto Rican woman trying to lead this fight and challenge things?” I asked.

“If I get the chance to knock on somebody's door and explain” Yvette responded, “and it's a Puerto Rican mom with kids or family and I get to show them this is what this ballot means or should mean to you and explain to them why they need to vote in a certain way and why they need to choose a party, why there are amendments there that are going to affect them, and why or how is that touching you. As a Puerto Rican woman, as a mom, as a person that lives here in the state of Florida, I wish to be able to share all these things so that I can help people participate in the system so you're not excluded.”

Scholars, such as Hardy-Fanta (1993) argue that Latinas have “a broader, more participatory model of political life” that is informed by making connections between issues and their everyday lives (3). Like the activists of MELA, who pushed back against the construction of a prison in their community (Pardo 1998), Yvette’s politics are inextricably linked to her own positionality. The intersection of politics with the “dinner table” reflects an ethnically centered articulation of the porous border between the domestic-public. It gestures towards what Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983, xviii) call “theory in the flesh,” an embodiment of the ways in which political involvement also emerges from the lived experiences and “physical realities of our lives…to create a politic born out of necessity” (23).

These motivators also point to the significance of intersectionality, which may influence political participation and serve as an asset in coalition building and campaign strategizing (Fraga et. al. 2008; García Bedolla 2008). In her work on Latinx political behavior, García Bedolla (2008) argues that "mobilizing identities," which she defines as "an identity that includes a particular ideology *plus* a sense of personal agency" (6), are predicated on the belief that individuals can enact change for the social group to which they are attached, despite their marginalization. In a political climate marked by anti-im/migrant rhetoric that demonizes the use of Spanish in public spaces and empowers racists to tell people of color to "go back to where you came from," the relationship between group attachments and stigmatization are important to understanding political activism and empowerment.

On the Radio

According to my interlocutors, one of the major obstacles to Puerto Rican political engagement was ignorance of the political system in the United States. Puerto Rico's electoral system appears similar to the rest of the United States, with general elections held every four years. However, unlike the United States, which holds midterm elections, multiple primaries, and special elections when necessary, Election Day in Puerto Rico is typically inclusive of all elected positions - making it a one-day event, every four years (Falcón 1983). As a result, Puerto Rican voter turnout in the United States is higher during presidential election years than during state and local elections (Falcón 1983; Vargas-Ramos 2016). The voter turnout rate in Puerto Rico is also consistently higher than that of the United States.

According to the Florida Division of Elections (2019), in 2016, there were nearly 3.5 million Florida voters who were not registered for either major party. This is significant because

Florida is one of 11 states with closed primaries, which means that voters who register as "No Party Affiliation" (NPA) cannot vote. Many Puerto Ricans, especially those recently arrived, do not always understand these key differences. There are also logistical factors that may hinder electoral participation, like knowing how to check your registration status or how to fill out an absentee ballot. As a result, civic education became a key component of voter mobilization strategies in the Orlando-Kissimmee area. In order to promote civic education, Yvette and Nilda reached a larger audience through a self-financed, one-hour public radio program.

***

I rang the doorbell to what appeared to be one of several apartments in an aging two-story building in Kissimmee and was escorted through a narrow hallway to an old red suede couch. It was not long before Yvette and Nilda came rushing into the studio. They informed me that their guest for the program had cancelled and suggested that I take their place. I felt an outpouring of anxiety at the prospect of an impromptu on-air interview, as they began testing their headsets and setting up a phone camera to live stream the show on social media.

Nilda opened the program by reading from a list of early voting centers in Orange and Osceola counties. She continued her discussion of the early voting process by presenting a number of scenarios that would disqualify votes, such as mismatched signatures on vote-by-mail and provisional ballots. She oscillated between English and Spanglish, while Yvette spoke primarily in Spanish. After a short break, they invited me to say a few words about my research. I shared that I was studying activism within the Puerto Rican community, focusing on the work of women. Yvette responded by commenting that many women leaders in the community do not

Figure 12: My microphone and headset. Photo by author, 2016.

view themselves as leaders.[55] As Yvette spoke, Nilda passed her a piece of paper. I squinted, as I made out the words: "Go easy on her." I did not know whether to laugh or breathe a sigh of relief. Nilda ended the show by reading a list of candidates and amendments aloud, with occasional emphasis on Puerto Rican candidates like Emily Bonilla and Daisy Morales. While she stated that the show did not take an official position in the mayor's race in Kissimmee, she added that she personally supported Álvarez because he was the "best candidate."

[55] I thought about the labels we use to define ourselves. I was at once reminded of Zavella's (1996) reflection on how her Chicana identity influenced her assumptions of women's ethnic identities. I wondered what these women might call themselves aside from the ascribed labels of "leader" or "activist."

As I learned upon moving to Orlando, public radio served as a cultural institution that not only reflected the changing demographics of the area, but also acted as a conduit for information, memories, and events important to the Puerto Rican community. According to Casillas (2014), Spanish-language radio can act as a "counterpublic," providing an alternative space for Latinos to discuss issues facing their communities. Similarly, Di Leonardo (2012) found that, during the 2012 Obama campaign, black American radio served as a "key public-sphere on-air organizer." Yvette's and Nilda's radio program fulfills a similar function, educating listeners on how voting (or conversely not voting) would affect their communities and providing information intended to combat disenfranchisement. But radio was not the only approach to increasing Puerto Rican electoral participation.

To the Streets

Less than an month before Election Day, I arrived at the parking lot where cars already lined up. People hurried to affix flags and signs on their car windows and doors. Several organizations, including *Boricua Vota*, Hispanic Federation, and Organize Now had united under the moniker, "*Que Vote Mi Gente*" (Vote, My People), in final push to mobilize Puerto Rican voters.[56] Before heading out, we gathered around in a makeshift circle to hear from some of the organizers. Jorge stepped forward to outline the main objective of the event.

"*Que la gente salga a votar* (That people go out and vote)," he said.

[56] Organize Now opened an office in Kissimmee which served as the headquarters for the campaign. The song "*Que Vote mi Gente*," a rewriting of Héctor Lavoe's salsa song, "*Mi Gente,*" became the anthem for the campaign. Sung by Frankie Negrón, the song's lyrics directly referenced the political power of Puerto Ricans living in Florida.

He reminded the crowd that while in Puerto Rico the police usually cooperate during *caravanas* (caravans), this was Central Florida. They had no permit for the event and traffic rules would be enforced.

"Here the police commissioner doesn't speak Spanish *yet.*"

Jorge was right about one thing - c*aravanas* did look different in Puerto Rico. As Brenda, a local politician running for a district house seat, explained:

> The way the *caravanas* work in Puerto Rico, it's a freaking national day practically, I mean it is a holiday. *Todos los politicos, casi la isla completa sale hacer la caravana* (All of the politicians, practically the whole island goes out to make the caravan). You know, it's like an island party.

Although certainly not to the same scale, some elements remained - the honking of car horns, the playing of music, and the waving of flags - as we weaved in and out of nearby neighborhoods. The *caravana* ended at Melao Bakery in Kissimmee, where participants gathered to register voters.

There was widespread disagreement among those involved in getting out the vote as to whether or not *caravanas* were an effective strategy. Organizations, like *Boricua Vota*, also hosted electoral *parrandas* (parties). Akin to caroling in the United States, *parrandas* are social events where participants parade through the streets and nearby businesses accompanied by instruments, such as tambourines and güiros. Despite these debates, the transplantation of these Puerto Rican political traditions represents a form of place-making, a process which Perez (2004) describes as "fundamentally about power - the power to make place out of space, the power to decide who belongs and who does not" (96). At times met with cheers by onlookers and at others with profanities, *caravanas* make visible the Puertoricanization of the city. They both literally and figuratively traverse borders - cutting through both white and non-white spaces alike, and marking them through the public performance of political and cultural subjectivities.

Figure 13: "Que Vote Mi Gente" *caravana* getting ready to depart from an old Kmart parking lot. Photo by author, 2016.

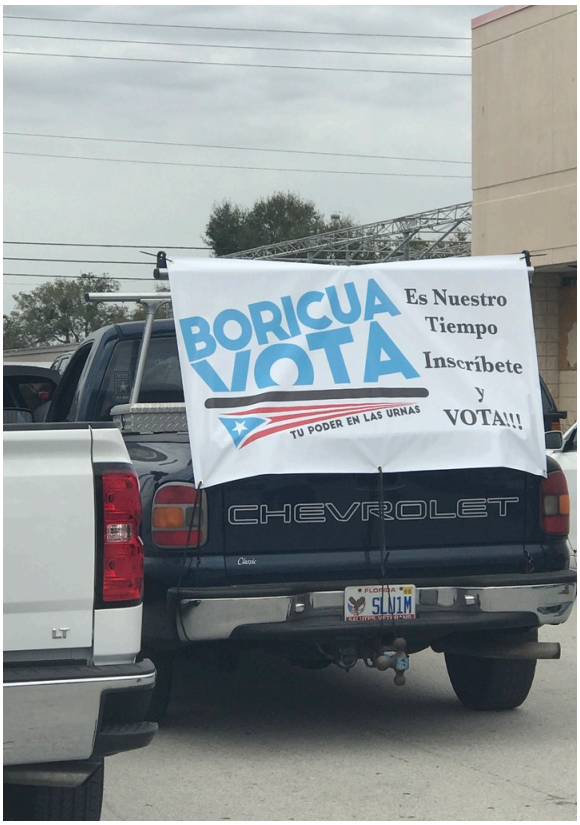

Figure 14: *Caravanas,* like the one above, were also used to put pressure on elected officials after Hurricane Maria. Photo by author, 2018.

Figure 15: "Que Vote Mi Gente" sign distributed at *caravanas.* Photo by author, 2016.

Caravanas ultimately signify what Juan Flores (1993) has described as one of the four stages in the awakening of Puerto Rican consciousness - a "re-entry" into Orlando that "now includes Puerto Ricans, if only by force of their own deliberate self-insertion into the urban landscape" (189).

This *caravana* and the "*Que Vote Mi Gente*" campaign was often cited as proof that organizational and personal differences could be set aside given a common goal. When I caught up with Teresa, the state director of a national Latinx organization, she spoke about the challenges to working together, including the lack of monetary and operational resources that limited many grassroots efforts.[57] These challenges, she explained, could be superseded given a "common denominator."

"We're a strong force. It's been challenging, I have to say," Teresa said, as we sat on the couch in her office long after everyone had gone home for the night. "But I think *mientras más se va haciendo, más ven, wow, mira lo que se puede lograr* (but I think the more we do, the more we see, wow, look what we can accomplish). *Por ejemplo, las organizaciones* they got together for "*Que Vote Mi Gente*" (For instance, the organizations, they got together for "*Que Vote Mi Gente").* There were organizations that didn't want to work together or people, whatever, *pero cada cuál tenía un role y esto es lo que queríamos lograr* (but each one had their own role and this what we wanted to accomplish)." [58]

The "*Que Vote Mi Gente*" campaign represented a moment of coalition building that, albeit temporarily, moved beyond the fractures within the Puerto Rican community. This, in part,

[57] Teresa had worked on various campaigns, including most recently that of Bernie Sanders.

[58] Nationally the Latino voter turnout rate was not statistically different between 2012 and 2016 (File 2017) and, on the state level, Latino turnout actually declined slightly (Frey 2017). However, the Latino voter registration rate in Florida was up from the 2012 elections.

was facilitated by the elimination of the competition for funding. As Xavier summed up: "This was a coalition built of people that were ripping at each other's heads before and then they were working together because they all had a common goal and that was to get out the vote. But now they were no longer fighting to get funding for voter registration." And while there existed a shared sense of pride afterwards, once the funding ran dry many of the same tensions returned – a reminder that "claiming public space can involve fragile alliances and enduring symbols, rooted in material realities and ethereal visions" (Ruiz 1998, 128).

The Gendered and Racialized Fault Lines of *Latinidad*

In exploring the transnational dimensions of activism, one must not lose sight of the significance of locality. Often referred to as the "gateway to Disney," the city of Kissimmee is located in Osceola county, just south of Orlando. It has a Latino population of 66.1 percent, with 35.6 percent identifying as Puerto Rican (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). Kissimmee was the stage for a heated political battle, during the 2016 local elections. As I will discuss in this section, what transpired not only reveals the fallacy of shared political within the Latinx community, but also among Puerto Ricans who remain invested in the long, arduous struggle for political representation.

***

When I arrived at *Acacia's El Centro Borinqueño* for "Political Salsa," a non-partisan mixer hosted by the Puerto Rican Bar Association of Florida, a crowd had already gathered. This inaugural event provided an opportunity for constituents to network with candidates running for political office and for those candidates to debate in a public forum. I maneuvered my way around the room, surveying my surroundings. The building, a central hub for the Puerto Rican

community, hosted press conferences, celebrations, meetings, and other events under the sunny landscape of "*El Viejo San Juan,*" a mural painted by Puerto Rican artist Amaury Díaz in 2012.[59] I had stepped through the doors of Acacia many times before, but this time I encountered a sea of red, white, and blue balloons. Chairs lined the front of the stage, while the back of the room was cluttered with rows of tables displaying campaign materials distributed by eager volunteers and hopeful politicians.

Figure 16: Attendees, candidates, and volunteers mingle at Political Salsa ahead of candidate debates. Photo by author, 2016.

[59] Formerly *Asociación Borinqueña*, the building is now more commonly known as Acacia. In 2014, New York-based Acacia Network bought the building from *Asociación Borinqueña* after the latter struggled to make the payments. For an overview of the building's history and its relationship to Puerto Rican cultural representations, including Díaz's mural, see Silver (2015).

The program began with the national anthems of Puerto Rico and the United States. The anthems were drowned out by a cacophony of voices, as people greeted each other with a kiss on the cheek before rushing to get a plate of *arroz con gandules* and *penir* (rice and pigeon peas and roast pork) before the line became too long. Well into the event, they called the two candidates for the Kissimmee mayoral race to the stage - Puerto Rican Arturo (Art) Otero and Cuban American José Álvarez.[60] The moderator asked Otero what could be done for the homeless living along the U.S. Highway 192 Corridor. When it came time for Álvarez to answer, he began by asking if he should pose his reply in English or Spanish. A nearby woman yelled, "ooooh," appearing to interpret Álvarez's statement as a passive aggressive jab at Otero, who had answered the same question just moments before in English. Tensions continued to mount as another moderator posed another question:

"Why should the citizens of Kissimmee not vote for his opponent and should vote for you?"

"*Yo creo que la ciudad de Kissimmee necesita a un alcalde que valla trabajar en conjunto con todos los comisionado. Una persona que tiene récord, que estado trabajando fielmente por esta comunidad. Y este servidor estado trabajando fielmente por esta comunidad. Fui el primer hispano, Boricua por que soy orgulloso de ser Boricua* (I believe that the city of Kissimmee needs a mayor who will work together with all the commissioners. A person who has a record, who has been working faithfully for this community. And this servant has been

[60] Both were former Republicans who switched to the Democratic party. Otero's campaign was clouded by a 2015 domestic violence investigation, following an argument at a local bar with his wife, Annabel. According to a report by the Orlando Sentinel, Annabel "had a lump larger than a golf ball on her forehead," when she arrived at the police station where she worked (Curtis 2015). She claimed that she had sustained the injury after jumping from a moving car. Otero allegedly later showed up to the police station drunk, yelling that he was a city commissioner and signed their paychecks (Curtis 2015). Otero was ultimately not charged in the incident.

working faithfully for this community. I was the first Hispanic, Boricua because I'm proud to be Boricua)," Otero said, as applause and cheers erupted throughout the room.

Someone started to chant, "Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico," as Otero continued. *"Tú no te reconoces como Cubano. Yo soy orgulloso de lo que yo soy, y te digo aquí, la ciudad de Kissimmee necesita un alcalde como yo - un leader que se ha levantado y que se ha dedicado trabajar por todos* (You don't recognize yourself as Cuban. I am proud of who I am, and I'll say it here, the city of Kissimmee needs a mayor like me - a leader that has lifted and dedicated himself to work for all)."

Alvarez swiftly responded, "So *vamos a hablar porque necesitan votar por mí. Número uno, este señor desde que lleva en la comisión no ha hecho nada. Todo lo que ha traído adelante de la comisionados no lo han dejado pasar. ¿Porque? Porque no hace su tarea. No sabe lo que está haciendo. Ahora, usted miran el récord mío y todo lo que ha traído a esa comisión para pasar, para apoyar a el Presidente Obama cuando paso el paso de la inmigración. Yo fui el que puse ese resolution … Entonces el sale y dice que yo soy racista porque no soy puertorriqueño. ¿Que tiene que ver eso? Yo como comisionado represento a más de 65 mil residentes de Kissimmee. El sale en el televisión y la radio que el solamente representa a la comunidad puertorriqueña. Perdónenme, pero yo represento a toda la comunidad…Esto no es una campagna de que eres puertorriqueño y yo no soy Puertorriqueño. Yo soy Dominicano, nací en Cuba, pero soy Americano, y yo soy comisionado de la ciudad de Kissimmee y represento a la comunidad entera* (So let's talk about why you need to vote for me. Number one, this man since he has been on the commission has done nothing. Everything he has brought before the commission has not passed. Why? Because he doesn't do his homework. He doesn't know what he's doing. Now, you look at my record and all that I've brought before the commission to pass,

to support President Obama during the passage of the immigration act. I was the one who put forth that resolution…Then he goes out and says that I am racist because I am not Puerto Rican. What does that have to do with this? As commissioner, I represent more than 65,000 residents of Kissimmee. He goes on television and radio saying that he only represents the Puerto Rican community. Sorry, but I represent the entire community…This is not a campaign that you're Puerto Rican and I am not Puerto Rican. I am a Dominican, I was born in Cuba, but I am American, and I am a commissioner of the city of Kissimmee and I represent the entire community)."

I quickly realized that this debate was less a dispute over policies or ideologies, than identity, namely, who was Puerto Rican enough to represent the people of Kissimmee. On her blog, *Orlando Latino*, journalist Maria Padilla (2016) summed up the controversy, writing: "Here's the crux of the matter: Otero is Puerto Rican and previously urged voters to 'vote for the Puerto Rican.' Álvarez, meanwhile, has committed the high crime of being Cuban-American." But as the narratives of Rosa and Brenda suggest, such a binary seems misleading.

Rosa and Brenda

Rosa routinely interrupted the interview to scold me for not drinking enough juice. As we sat at her kitchen table, she fondly remembered growing up in San Juan in the 1940s, in the one room house she shared with her parents and five siblings. A self-proclaimed "*politica*" and "*bien confrontativa*" ("political" and "very confrontational"), Rosa became involved in politics at a young age. Upon graduating high school and getting married, she worked as a secretary for her

husband who had secured a position with the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP).[61] She went on to run several campaigns for politicians in Puerto Rico and later in Orlando, claiming: "*La parte mia es guiarlos*" (My role is to guide them). By this, Rosa meant teaching candidates how to think like politicians, whether that meant strategically establishing a presence in a Black community in order to secure future votes, or introducing them to her network.

Not long into our conversation, we broached the subject of the Kissimmee mayor's race, which she affectionately referred to during a later conversation as "*el caldero del diablo*" (the devil's cauldron). Rep. Victor Torres, a Puerto Rican running for Florida State Senate, publicly supported Álvarez. The two could be seen canvassing together in photographs posted on Facebook, and an advertisement paid for by Álvarez circulated on social media, with a portrait of Rep. Torres and others who endorsed him. This greatly upset Rosa, leading her to confront Rep. Torres.

"*Yo estaba molesta con Victor…ayudando a el Cubano que esta aya contra del puertorriqueño. Llame a Victor y él me llamó pa'tras. ¿Fíjate, como tú estas ayudando el Cubano que está en contra del de nosotros? Yo le dije que yo no voy a respaldar a nadie que esté echando a correr a uno en contra de nosotros. El de nosotros, por malo que sea, mejor que el de ellos* (I was upset with Victor…helping the Cuban who is against the Puerto Rican. I called Victor and he called me back. Look, how are you helping the Cuban who is against us? I told him that I'm not going to support anyone who is casting someone to run against us. Ours, however bad he may be, is better than theirs)."

[61] PNP is one of the three registered political parties in Puerto Rico. They are known for their pro-statehood stance. The other two parties include the *Partido Popular Democrático* (Popular Democratic Party), which is pro-commonwealth, and the *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (Puerto Rican Independence Party), which supports independence for the archipelago.

Brenda, on the other hand, chose to support Álvarez, garnering criticism from others like Rosa. When I met her at a Panera Bread in her district, Brenda wore a t-shirt emblazoned with her name, indicating her own candidacy for a district house seat. Born in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s, Brenda moved to Florida at 22 years old. For her, politics was a family affair. Her parents participated in grassroots activism and the local Democratic Party, often putting her to work. It was not until the 2008 Obama campaign, that Brenda, like many of my interlocutors, became invested in electoral politics. She recalled watching then-Illinois State Senator Barack Obama's speech at the 2004 DNC National Convention and calling her parents immediately after to say that if he ever ran for President she would work on his campaign. In 2007, after he had announced his candidacy, Brenda did just that after meeting a small group of volunteers who would come to call themselves "Orlando for Obama." She remembered all the labor involved – passing out flyers, knocking on doors, and even organizing a rally at the Civic Center for the future president – all unpaid, like the labor of many Puerto Rican women and other Latinas in the engaged in this type of work.

After the presidential elections, Brenda went on to become the chair the Orange County Democrats and run several other campaigns, including her own earlier unsuccessful run for another district seat. She was outspoken about the challenges she has faced as a Puerto Rican woman running for office.

"If it's a guy, it's like, 'Oh, you should do, it. You'd be great at it.' If it's a woman, it's like, 'What gives you the qualifications to do it."

I asked Brenda about her decision to support Álvarez and her thoughts on how the race played out in the public eye.

"Let's talk about what divides us," she began. "Everybody else who's not Latino, whatever culture you come from, they see us all exactly the damn same. You can be Rican, Cuban, whatever, whatever. You're exactly the same. You're a brown person. You're not from here. That battle that they got going on, that Álvarez is not Puerto Rican, that's a disservice to the entire community, but more so the Puerto Rican community. You know why? Because that's exactly what they know that will divide us and if they can pick at it, they will do so. You can disagree with an opponent at any given moment, that's good, competition is good, the democracy, the battle is good. You want to have a battle on issues, you want to have a battle on the differences between me and you, I'm all for it. But when you use ethnicity as your sole catapult, what you're doing is a disservice."

We cannot talk about the ideological differences between Puerto Rican women like Rosa and Brenda without considering the concept of *Latinidad*. *Latinidad* denotes a collective Latinx identity, which can manifest itself in different ways. In his study of the emergence of Latino ethnic consciousness among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago, Padilla (1985) finds that "*Latinismo*," or a shared Latino experience, can operate situationally as a tool in political and grassroots organizing. Similarly, DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas (2003) maintain that "Latinidad as a principle of racialized (or 'ethnic') organization can acquire unprecedented meaning in the production of an oppositional political identity aimed at securing substantive citizenship rights, entitlements, and electoral representation" (20). Other scholars have documented moments of Latinx coalition and community building wrought out of shared struggle (Fernández 2012; Lee 2014; E. Padilla 2002[1947]; Rúa 2012). Brenda's assertion that "they see us all exactly the damn same" gestures towards the homogenizing construction of

Latinidad that becomes representative not only of individual attitudes, but also of the deployment of *Latinidad* by the state in the current neoliberal multicultural moment (Hale 2005).

Brenda's own mother, Nilda, shared a similar view to her daughter.

"Within our own Hispanic communities everybody is pulling," she told me over lunch. "*Que si los cubanos aqui, los puertorriqueños allá. Que si los dominicanos, los peruanos, los ecuatorianos* (That the Cubans here, the Puerto Ricans there. That the Dominicans, the Peruvians, the Ecuadorians). I'm like, really? Let me tell you guys something. All of you are Mexican, because every freaking gringo thinks that a Hispanic is a Mexican for whatever reason. So why don't you just get together and unite and be a force?"

Nilda paints a picture of *Latinidad* in relation to whiteness. For her, *Latinidad* represents a "political formation" (DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas 2003, 20) that can either yield power or let its possibility slip away. On the other hand, for others like Rosa, p*uertorriqueñismo* provides a strategic basis for acquiring electoral power, cultivating an oppositional identity not only against non-Latinx whites, but also other Latinxs. This strategy included not running Puerto Rican candidates against each other, because how else could Puerto Ricans hope to acquire "*puestos que tengan poder*" (posts which have power), if *"todavía no tenemos la fuerza política"* (we still don't have the political force)? Her words reflect the historical and contemporary struggle to claim space in the city through electoral politics.

The racialization of Álvarez as "the Cuban" and Otero as "the Puerto Rican" illustrates the problematics of *Latinidad* (Aparicio 2003; DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Flores 2000; Oboler 1995; Rúa and Garcia 2007). It also points to the messy contours of Latinx identity. For instance, Álvarez's Dominican descent was rarely acknowledged. In fact, had he not mentioned it during the debate, I would never had known, as he was always referred to as the Cuban or

Cuban American by the media and my interlocutors. Take also, for example, Cecilia, who we met at the beginning of this chapter. Cecilia would sometimes spend her childhood summers in Mexico with her paternal grandparents. As an adult working with Mexican laborers in Texas, she told me that she was often confused for Mexican.

"*Si cierro la boca, paso* for *Mexicana* (If I close my mouth, I can pass as Mexican)," she laughed as she said.

The erasure of both Álvarez's and Cecilia's border subjectivities serves as yet another manifestation of *Latinidad. Latinidad* is perhaps best described as "a concept that allows us to explore moments of convergences and divergences in the formation of Latina/o (post)colonial subjectivities and hybrid cultural expressions among various Latina/o subjectivities" (Aparicio 2003, 93). This explication does not dismiss the potentiality of *Latinidad*, while recognizing the fractures - fractures that, in this case, are entrenched in the struggle for power among Puerto Ricans, other Latinxs, and non-Latinx whites that has historically affected the Puerto Rican community.[62] The 2011 racially-charged process of redistricting in Orange County represents one of those moments.

Redistricting

Redistricting, which refers to the redrawing of district lines to determine legislative representatives, occurs every ten years following the U.S. Census. During the first half of the twentieth century in Florida, as in much of the United States, population growth began to shift away from rural areas and towards metropolitan centers (MacManus et al. 2015). Despite these

[62] Moments of potentiality like the establishment of the Immigrant Trust Coalition, which united Puerto Ricans with other ethnic groups throughout the city, or the "*Que Vote Mi Gente*" campaign discussed earlier in this chapter.

demographic shifts, electoral representation remained the same. This issue was at the heart of the 1962 Supreme Court case Baker v. Carr. Charles Baker, a Republican who lived in an urban area, sued Tennessee Secretary of State Joseph Carr, arguing that his district was underrepresented compared to rural districts with lower populations (Crea 2004). The Court ruled that federal courts had the power to intervene in redistricting issues. This critical decision was significant as it provided the impetus for the redrawing of district lines in other states, such as Florida, in order to achieve more equal representation.

As Silver (2020) notes in in her ethnography of Puerto Rican political life in Orlando, redistricting is a contested process that often marginalizes underrepresented voters. She provides a detailed account of the 2011 Orange County redistricting, which ultimately diluted Latinx voting strength. First, a Redistricting Advisory Committee composed of 15 members was tasked with recommending new district lines to the Orange County Board of County Commissioners. Of those fifteen members, three were Latinos - two Cuban and one Nicaraguan. Isabel, an Indiana-born activist who, like many of the women I met, had spent several years living on the archipelago before moving to Central Florida, expressed outrage that not a single Puerto Rican was chosen for the committee given the demographic composition of the county. She, along with a handful of others, approached the mayor and commissioners at one of their meetings. Taking a Puerto Rican flag with her, she addressed the room.

"We are American citizens, many have contributed greatly to Orange County, we have brought universities here, we have brought banks here, we have brought every kind of business you can imagine here. This is a disrespect to our community not to have Puerto Ricans."

Despite her passionate appeal, none of the members of the committee wanted to relinquish their seat so that Puerto Ricans would have the opportunity to be represented.

"They ignored us," Isabel explained. "They said no, we are here, none of them wanted to give up their seat. It was blacks, it was whites, and then those three. And what they just said was oh, they're Latinos, Hispanics, you're all the same."

According to Silver (2015) "the racial and ethnic make-up of the committee maintained the tenets of neoliberal multiculturalism by giving the appearance of diversity while in fact maintaining class solidarity with the business community's corporate interests" (393). In other words, the selection of the committee grants Puerto Ricans some "Hispanic" representation while, at the same time, constraining their political power. District 3 already had a reputation as "the Latino district," when the redistricting public hearings began. Puerto Rican and Latino leaders, together with Black (and some white) allies, rallied to make District 3 a majority-minority district (Silver 2013).[63] They proposed a map that would make District 3 a 49.3 percent Latino voting-age population district. However, they faced swift opposition by the likes of Republican senator and redistricting committee member Alan Hays, who during a redistricting committee meeting, declared:

> I think we need to direct the staff, and we ourselves need to consider very, very cautiously before we design a district anywhere in the State of Florida for Hispanic voters, we need to ascertain that they are citizens of the United States. We all know there are many Hispanic speaking people in Florida that are not legal, and I don't think it's right that we try to draw a district that encompasses people who really have no business voting anyhow. Now if we know that registered voters are people who have proven their citizenship, then that's a completely different story, but I am not aware of any proof of citizenship necessary before you register to vote. (as cited in Dunkelberger 2011)

Hays' insinuation that "Hispanic speaking people" should be required to prove their citizenship status before voting drew public outrage. It also reflected his ignorance to the fact that all Puerto Ricans, who comprised the majority of that district's population, are U.S. citizens at birth since

[63] Black voters had a common interest in protecting their voting strength. Together, they formed the Black, Latino and Puerto Rican Alliance for Justice.

the Jones Act of 1917. But this type of discourse permeated Florida politics. Just a few years earlier, in 2008, U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite from Florida's 5th congressional district issued a press release criticizing a proposed economic stimulus bill in the House, arguing that "the bill sends hundreds of millions of dollars to people who do not pay federal income taxes, including residents of Puerto Rico and territories like Guam," and that she does "not believe American taxpayer funds should be sent to *foreign* citizens who do not pay taxes" (as cited in Lytle, 2008, my emphasis).[64]

Hays and others who opposed the creation of a majority-minority district eventually got their way. Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs and the County Commission voted for a redistricting plan that would split the Latino population between districts 3 and 4, decreasing the percentage of Latinos in both districts, thus, making it difficult to ensure the future election of a Puerto Rican or other Latino representative.

"There were times I got here one in the morning fighting with those people," Isabel recounted, "Fighting and fighting and fighting… of course, they picked the two districts that we didn't want - the 40 percent districts…What happened was in District 3, after they chose those two districts that were going to be ours, well in District 3, the historically Latino district, there were two Latinos that ran - one was Boricua, one was Panamanian out of five candidates, they ran for commissioner. The Panamanian came in 4th place, the Puerto Rican came in last place. It was the worst result for any Hispanic in the history of District 3."

As a result, Isabel and three other Latino plaintiffs brought a lawsuit against the county. Represented by Latino Justice PRLDEF, the group argued that the map violated Section Two of

[64] Some activists recalled boarding a bus from Orlando to Brown-Waite's office in Brooksville, Florida to protest her comments. See also Silver (2017).

the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA), which made discriminatory voting practices illegal. A federal judge in Orlando heard the case in May 2014. It was eventually dismissed, but the 2011 redistricting process represents a case racial gerrymandering.[65] Events such as these become part of the collective memory of political actors, informing the present and future battles for electoral representation in Central Florida.

Race

Another key area of divergence involves the erasure of blackness in discourses of both *Latinidad* and *Puertorriqueñidad.* Lisa, an organizer from Chicago in her mid-30s, like Brenda and other women I spoke with, reflected on her gendered interactions within activist spaces, recalling meetings where "older Puerto Rican men" would raise their voices at women or dismiss their input altogether.

"It's already hard in and of itself to like hold your own ground in those spaces but then the extra level of being super strategic to not let the men undermine you," Lisa said. "It's an extra level effort that it takes. And so, if you dismiss the women enough or you discredit them period, a lot of women will just go on their own. I've seen that…I have a higher tolerance because of other work that I do, so I can take it and I'll undermine you right back."

But Lisa's Afro-Boricua identity was also important to her experiences with activism and her relationships with other Puerto Ricans. She recalled feelings of not "fitting in," when she became more aware of her own positionality in her teenage years.

[65] For a more detailed account of the redistricting process in the Orlando area, including the proposed redistricting maps and testimonies, see Silver (2020).

"For me, growing up, it was confusing being Afro-Puerto Rican," she said. "It just felt like I was oftentimes mistaken for like African American, but then I'm not, but then I don't speak Spanish, so where do I fit?"

Lisa explained that she related more to her Black peers, rather than the Latinxs who lived in her neighborhood and attended her school.

"What about here in Orlando with the Puerto Rican community?" I asked.

"Here I think it's rarer to see in the activist spaces, particularly, the Afro-Boricuas. So that kind of bothered me at times because for me it's like ok, this white, blue-eyed Puerto Rican that can articulate the struggles of people of color was just like, this is kind of – I'm just not used to that. Even in Chicago it was a bit more diverse…But I haven't felt that division as much here. It's definitely much more embracing but in a different way. That attribute of my identity is still invisible at times, but it's just more subtle. It's not in your face."

"How would you say it's invisible? Do you have an example?" I asked, unsure of what she meant.

"Yeah, there have been times that I've been in meetings where even, particularly with Black Lives Matter coming up and the way it's talked about around some Puerto Rican activists, it's like, 'Oh, ok. We're going to be in solidarity.' The assumption is that Puerto Ricans don't share that struggle based on your race. So that's happened and then I've had someone try to explain the different identities of you know, we come from African, we come from Spanish, and Taino. That kind of owning and talking about that."

Lisa's examples point to the ways that blackness and *Latinidad*/*Puertorriqueñidad* are oftentimes constructed as mutually exclusive. The "invisibility" of her blackness is, in part, facilitated by the notion of *tres razas* (three races), an ideology of racial mixture predicated on

the idea that all Puerto Ricans have Taino, Spanish, and African roots. This iteration of mestizaje approaches a commonsense of whiteness in that it "dissolves black and brown bodies into white in a national space thick with the dialectics of racial formation" (Rosas 2012, 79).[66] In nineteenth century Puerto Rico, the discourse of mestizaje was propagated by the Puerto Rican creole elite, who sought to fashion a new image of the Puerto Rican nation following the imposition of U.S. colonialism. However, this nation-building project rested on the *blanqueamiento* or whitening of the Puerto Rican population (Rodriguez-Silva 2012), as evidenced by the folklorization of blackness and its emplacement in certain geographic locales (Godreau 2015; Rivera-Rideau 2013).[67] These ideas travel with the bodies of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora to Florida.

While in the following chapter I address the whiteness of queer spaces, there is also the need for further examination of the whiteness of activist spaces and to ask whether representation for Puerto Ricans includes all Puerto Ricans. Attending to the intersections of race and gender, not only allows us to see the shortcomings of a unilateral focus on ethnicity and nationhood, but also elucidates key differences among Puerto Rican activists in Central Florida.

Conclusion: Tomorrow

Election Day, November 2016. It was early evening when I arrived at the offices of Hispanic Federation/Somos Orlando for a watch party. Organizational leaders and staff, volunteers, and their families filtered in and out of the room throughout the night - making just

[66] Goldberg (2002) also maintains that "race is integral to the emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, materially) of the modern nation-state" (4).

[67] For more on mestizaje and blackness in Puerto Rico and Latin America, see Alonso 2004; Godreau 2015; Guidotti-Hernandez 2011; Mallon 1996; Torres 1998; and Wade 2005.

one stop of many.[68] Spirits ran high as we chatted over food and drinks - *pernil*, chicken, *arroz con gandules*, dessert, wine, and beer. But it got quieter and quieter as projections filtered in throughout the night. While many of us left in tears, uncertain about the America we would soon face, there were also some notable victories that day.

Although the state went red, Orange and Osceola counties turned blue. Darren Soto became first person of Puerto Rican descent to represent Florida's 9th Congressional District in Congress. Víctor Torres won the race for State Senate to represent District 15 and his daughter, Amy Mercado, took his seat in House District 48. Emily Bonilla defeated long-time incumbent Ted Edwards, taking the District 5 seat on the Orange County Commission. We celebrated their wins as a step towards more Puerto Rican representation at the local, state, and national levels. However, over in Kissimmee, José Álvarez overwhelmingly beat Art Otero, becoming the city's first Latino mayor.

Two years later, the 2018 midterms also proved historic, especially for women of color. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar became the first Muslim woman in Congress; Deb Haaland and Sharice Davids became the first Native American women elected to Congress; and Puerto Rican Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from New York became the youngest woman in Congress. In Central Florida, Amy Mercado retained her seat; Daisy Morales was reelected to Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District, Seat 2; Maribel Gomez Cordero became the Orange County Commissioner for District 4; and former "Orange County Public Schools Teacher of the Year," Johanna López was elected to the Orange County School Board in District 2. Puerto Rican women continued to be engaged in *"el trabajo duro"* (the hard work), but they also claimed their

[68] There were multiple watch parties going on throughout Orlando and Kissimmee area.

own spaces within elected office. Such wins are evidence of the shifting roles of Puerto Rican women within Central Florida's electoral landscape.

In this chapter, I privileged the political activities of women, offering a brief portrait of Puerto Rican political life in the Orlando-Kissimmee area. The narratives of the women on these pages demonstrate an understanding of politics that can neither be separated from everyday life or Puerto Ricans positionality within the structure of Florida politics. I also bring out how *Latinidad* and *Puertorriqueñidad* are equally fraught categories that undergird the struggle for electoral representation in ways that disrupt notions of "community" and belonging. As Torres-Saillant (2009) cautions, "to assume Latino [and I would add, Puerto Rican] unity is to forgo the hard work, long time, and deep thought that bringing it about will take" (435). Despite these tensions, Puerto Ricans continue to mobilize and engage in place-making practices as a means of achieving political power for Puerto Ricans living in Central Florida and, by extension, on the archipelago.

I close this chapter with the words of Cecilia, who tells me that each night before bed her roommate, a fellow organizer, reminds her: "'*Recuerda que mañana va a ser mejor*.' Remember that tomorrow is going to be better. You have to fight for it. Take a rest, breathe a while, but get up. You have to aspire to that."

It was a new year, two months after the November 2016 elections.

"Now in these times that are going to get tougher…people need to keep on dreaming that it will get fucking better," she continued, trying to reassure me, or perhaps herself.

This is "politics in rice and beans terms." That shared moment of reflection between two Puerto Rican women on a quiet, ordinary day in January captures the everydayness of "crisis" – the ways that crisis is manifest in the spaces between the domestic-pubic, the tensions over

representation, and the fears over that nascent tomorrow. And in many cases, as Part II indicates, there is no anticipating what is to come. What there is, however, is the dream "that it will get fucking better," as activists struggle to respond to catastrophe and assert belonging in both Central Florida and to a larger Puerto Rican community.

PART II

(Un)natural Disasters: Mass Shootings, Hurricanes, and Constructions of Community

CHAPTER 4

"SOMOS ORLANDO" (WE ARE ORLANDO):

SEXUALITY, GENDER AND THE LANGUAGE OF CRISIS

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, and into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.

- Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning"

On June 12, 2016, at 4:17 a.m., I awoke to a BBC alert on my phone which read: "Florida police confirm multiple injuries from shooting at Orlando's Pulse gay nightclub, warn people to stay away." I was half asleep and gun violence has increasingly become normalized in the United States, as evidenced by Sandy Hook, Aurora, San Bernardino, Charleston, and more recently, El Paso, Ohio, Las Vegas, and Parkland. I sighed and went back to sleep. It was not until I woke up later that morning that I realized the magnitude of the shooting: 49 dead and 53 wounded.[69] The gunman used an assault rifle, reigniting the debate around gun reform and fueling the speculations of terrorism that often follow such tragedies in this post-9/11 historical moment. While the event was deemed as an act of violence against the LGBTQ community, there was little to no mention in those early reports that it also happened to be "Latin Night." As the images and names of victims began to flash across my television screen, I felt the uneasy transition from

[69] This number does not include the gunman who was killed by police.

Figure 17: Memorial outside the Orlando Regional Medical Center, the hospital where survivors were treated. Photo by author, 2016.

Figures 18 and 19: Makeshift memorials on the lawn of the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. The flag on the right merges elements of the Puerto Rican and rainbow Pride flags, serving as a visual representation of queer *Puertorriqueñidad*. Photos by author, 2016.

Figure 20: Forty-nine white crosses alongside Lake Beauty. Built by Greg Zanis, a carpenter from Illinois, the crosses each bore the name and photo of a different victim. Puerto Rican flags were affixed to nearly half the crosses. Photo by author, 2016.

sadness to anger. Eighty percent of the victims were Latinx and nearly half, 23 of the 49, were Puerto Rican. If you had any doubts, all you had to do was walk around the city in the days following the attack. Puerto Rican flags and others symbols of *Puertorriquenidad* covered the expansive lawn of the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, and lined the pathways to Orlando Regional Medical Center and Pulse nightclub. The Puerto Rican flag tied to the bark of a nearby tree, the candle to a patron saint lit near a loved one's photograph and messages of love

and solidarity chalked on the sidewalk in Spanish – these material expressions of love and grief at once disidentified with the whiteness of queer identity and stood in stark contrast to the erasure of queer brown and black bodies from the public imaginary of mourning.[70]

Figure 21: The scene at Pulse nightclub after the shooting. Fenced off by police, a memorial grows at the base of the sign. Photo by author, 2016.

Pulse was a gay nightclub located on South Orange Avenue, not far from downtown Orlando, which opened its doors on July 2, 2004. It was founded by Barbara Poma and Ron Legler, in memory of Poma's brother John, who died in 1991 from HIV related illnesses. According to Pulse's (2015) former website, the club was named for John's heartbeat. The reverberations of that early morning were felt across borders in more ways than one.

Pulse marked a turning point for my research. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1993) "urges that social analysis recognize how much of life happens in ways that one neither plans nor expects. Plans and expectations themselves can also change in ways that are usually passed over in silence" (91). Throughout graduate school, I learned the important lesson that "life happens."

[70] In his photo essay "*Cruces*," Lugo (2006) demonstrates the ways that "ethnographic photographs…capture both everyday life and everyday death" (745), through the powerful images of crosses. The crosses seen in Figure 20 similarly reflect a "material site(s) of intersection" (745), not only of life and death, but of race, sexuality, and mourning that transcend borders.

But being "in the field" forced me to confront that idea in new ways that required me to re-evaluate my research questions and move towards a more intersectional analysis. I begin this chapter by examining the intersection of sexuality and gender, eliciting some of the factors that compelled migration from Puerto Rico to Orlando in the first place. As one of my interlocutors assessed, "We know that it didn't have to be Latin night for it to be mostly Latinos in that club." Pulse was a diasporic tragedy, as evidenced not only by the overwhelming number of Puerto Ricans affected in Orlando and in Puerto Rico, but also by the institutional and cultural factors which reify heteronormative whiteness.

On the day of the shooting, I came across a blog post on *Orlando Latino,* titled, "Latinas Translate for Victims' Families" (Padilla 2016). The post described how a "group of Latinas" came together within hours of the tragedy to try to coordinate translation and mental health services for the families of victims and survivors. The core group of women, whom I would later learn were Puerto Rican, drew on their networks to form a coalition of Latinx organizations, which led to the eventual founding of "*Proyecto Somos Orlando*" (We are Orlando Project).[71] I reached out to several of the women mentioned in that blog post and would come to know them well over the course of my fieldwork period. The second half of this chapter documents the activist efforts of these women. *Somos* emerged as a critical response - a reminder that we, too, are Orlando. As Monica, one of *Somos*' co-founders put it, "The Latino voice was not part of the narrative and *no nos dio la gana* (we didn't want to) to keep quiet." This chapter is as much about their refusal to keep quiet as it is about diasporic belonging.

[71] Throughout this chapter, I will simply refer to *Proyecto Somos Orlando* as *Somos*, as it was commonly referred to by my interlocutors.

Queering Sexuality and Gender

Behind the proclamations of solidarity that were heard around the world post-Pulse, were also less audible stories like that of one father who refused to accept his son's body from the morgue because he was gay (Padilla 2016). These stories are far from exceptional. Nearly a decade ago in Puerto Rico, a young teenager by the name of Jorge Steven López Mercado was found decapitated, burned, and dismembered on the side of the road in Cayey (*El Nuevo Dia* 2009). Juan José Martínez Matos confessed to the crime, according to police reports, alleging that he thought Mercado was a woman when he picked him up in area known for sex workers. While Martínez Matos was convicted of Mercado's murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison, he was not charged with a hate crime. While such cases are sometimes brought into focus by the media, the everydayness of homophobia coupled with the constraints of gendered cultural norms are often relegated to quiet reflection.

Martin Manalansan (2006) has called for a queer reading of sexuality in gender and migration research, which uncovers the ways in which "sexuality is disciplined by social institutions and practices that normalize and naturalize heterosexuality and heterosexual practices including marriage, family, and biological reproduction by marginalizing persons, institutions, or practices that deviate from these norms" (225). In this section, I introduce Alejandra and Xan, two young people who I met post-Pulse. Through their narratives, I examine how the sometimes-blurred boundaries between gender and sexuality can provide a framework for understanding not only homophobia, but also the impetus for migration, as well as the negotiation of identities in movement (Carillo 2004; Povinelli and Chauncey 1999).

I first met Alejandra at FUERZAfest, a Latinx LGBTQ arts festival, which was started by Hispanic Federation/*Proyecto Somos Orlando* nearly 6 months after Pulse. We set up a time to

meet up at a later date at a local Starbucks before her shift at work. Alejandra was a soft-spoken, poetic young woman from Ponce with a penchant for art. She lived most of her life in Puerto Rico, although she had previously spent some time living in Boston and other parts of Florida due to her parents' employment. Upon finishing high school and starting college at a Catholic university in Puerto Rico, Alejandra, who identified as gay/lesbian, made the decision to leave the archipelago because she was afraid of being outed. While Alejandra felt that Pulse had created the opportunity for more dialogue regarding sexuality in Puerto Rico, she explained that there was more work to be done.

"It's still very old-fashioned, like back in my grandma's days. You're a failure if you're not married by a certain age and have kids by a certain age. The concept of making it as an adult, especially for women, is to find a husband and have kids before 30. So, if you don't have a boyfriend or a husband, they always have that saying of like, '*Te vas a quedar jamona,*' which means like, I don't know how to translate it in English."

"Like an old maid?" I asked.

"Exactly. It's a little bit more unfair for the women in the community and that goes even deeper as women of color in our community. There are things that I didn't go through because of my light-skin, that my darker skinned friends went through. But then that coin flip at some point because of traveling back and forth, I wasn't able to belong to just one. I kind of like meshed both cultures and I was seen as the gringa back home and not American enough over here…But when it comes to the gay community, growing up that was a big no-no."

The term *jamona*, which Alejandra references, is the equivalent of a spinster or old maid. Translated literally as "ham," it is used to refer to a woman who is unmarried and "old," and oftentimes perceived to be unattractive or overweight. The *jamona* appears in Esmeralda

Santiago's (1993) autobiographical book, *When I was Puerto Rican*. In the chapter titled, "Why Women Remain Jamona," the protagonist Negi (Esmeralda) takes a trip with her father to visit her grandmother in Santurce. Along the way, they stop at a market. There, Negi sees a woman with a "long, mournful face, horselike, her large eyes almond shaped, the corners pointed down as if weighed by many tears" (88). She notes a change in the atmosphere - "the space around her felt cold" (88). After whirling on a stool at the counter of an *alcapurria* (stuffed fritter) stand and falling to the ground, Negi again sees the woman who admonishes her, saying, "Jesus doesn't love children who don't behave" (88). The man behind the counter shoos her away and turns to Negi's father.

> "That's what happens to women when they stay *jamonas*," he said with a snort, and Papa laughed with him. The gray woman retreated to her bleeding heads.
>
> "Papi, what's a jamona?" I asked as we left the market, our bellies full.
>
> "It's a woman who has never married."
>
> "I thought that was a señorita."
>
> "It's the same thing. But when someone says a woman is jamona it means she's too old to get married. It's an insult."
>
> "How come?"
>
> "Because it means no one wants her. Maybe she's too ugly to get married….Or she has waited too long.…She ends up alone for the rest of her life. Like that woman in the mercado."
>
> "She was ugly for sure."
>
> "That's probably why she stayed jamona."
>
> "I hope that never happens to me."

"No, that won't happen to you…There's our publico. Let's run for it."

We dodged across the street holding hands, avoiding cars, people, and stray dogs sunning themselves on the sidewalk.

"What do they call a man who never marries?" I asked as we settled ourselves in the front of the publico.

"Lucky," the driver said, and the rest of the passengers laughed, which made me mad, because it felt as if he were insulting me in the worst possible way. (89)

Later, after her father had left Negi at her grandmother's house for more than a week to presumably cheat on her mother, Negi's mother arrives to pick her up. As she observes her mother's tear stained face and hears the quiet whispers of her conversation with her *abuela* (grandmother) in the next room, Negi wonders whether being a *jamona* is such a bad thing after all. "It seemed to me that remaining jamona could not possibly hurt this much," Negi ponders. "That a woman alone, even if ugly, could not suffer as much as my beautiful mother did . . . I would just as soon remain jamona than shed that many tears over a man" (104).

In Alejandra's and Negi's narratives above, the statements "*te vas a quedar jamona*" (you're going to stay *jamona*) and "that's what happens to women when they stay *jamonas*," reveal not only the normalized gendered expectations of women, but also acts as a cautionary tale of the miserable life that lays ahead if a woman does not marry and procreate. Further, the juxtaposition of the unmarried woman as *jamona* and the unmarried man as "lucky" in Santiago's work reveals the sexist double standard embedded in prescribed gender norms. But a queer reading of the figure of the *jamona* offers a different perspective. The *jamona* herself embodies queerness. She deviates from the heteronormative family models and sexist cultural practices that she grapples with. She is, in many ways, a border subject. As Espín (1996) found

in her study of Latina lesbian migrants, "the immigrant woman finds herself caught between the racism of the dominant society and the sexist and heterosexist expectations of their own communities" (82). If we return momentarily to Alejandra's words, they acknowledge the multiple oppressions and privileges that intersect with her sexuality, including the privilege afforded to her by her light skin, that are, in turn, mediated by processes such as migration.[72]

I met Xan at Puerto Rico Day in Tallahassee, a bipartisan event hosted by The Puerto Rican Bar Association of Florida which included "cultural activities," as well as various panels on issues pertaining to Central Florida's growing Puerto Rican population. Unlike Alejandra, Xan's memories of Puerto Rico are sparse, having moved to Florida from San Juan at a young age. Xan, who identifies as genderqueer and trans-masculine, explained the difficulties of negotiating their ethnic, sexual, and gender identity across different social spaces:[73]

> Navigating it, it's interesting because it's pretty similar as before I came out as trans as when I'm trans. The only difference is it's more hyped, more of a hyper thing. When I came out as a lesbian, I was a butch lesbian. I identified as a bull dyke at one point and then I identified as just a dyke for a while, but my presentation was always more masculine. In Spanish circles I would automatically be lumped into the boy's club and there was always an expectation of that same kind of machismo to be experienced by me and to hell with that. Like once I came out even in those safe spaces, you had the adult men who knew I was gay would make jokes about women thinking I would just laugh along, play along, objectifying women, that kind of thing. Or make jokes about how that woman's crazy or how that woman looks fine, that kind of thing. It's something that exists in the white masculinity culture, but it's something unique to the Spanish culture because it's more than just a misogyny thing it's a culturalism almost. To reject it is rejecting both my masculine currency and my Hispanic currency."[74]

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[72] In his theorization of the border inspections, Lugo (2008, 2000) contends that inspections - both material and symbolic - are shaped by such factors such as gender, class, race, and color hierarchies, the latter of which also have colonial origins. Alejandra's words gesture towards the prevalence of color hierarchies or colorism (see also, Keith 2009; Hochshild and Weaver 2007; Hunter 2002; Telles 2004) among Puerto Ricans.

[73] I use the preferred gender pronouns of my interlocutors.

[74] I was reminded of my own experience on the bus trip to Tallahassee. A man seated a few rows ahead of me was having a lively conversation with his friends. Over the music and singing of the

Xan's theorization of machismo as a "culturalism" reflects the ways in which several of my interlocutors spoke of their experiences with sexism and/or homophobia on the archipelago and among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Machismo is a term used to describe masculinity in Latin America and its diasporas. As a concept, machismo denotes that men are the authority in their households. They are breadwinners, who are protective of women, sexually dominant, independent, and aggressive (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Perilla 1999). While the concept of machismo can be useful for examining the lens through which Latinx masculinities and gender roles are viewed or constructed, machismo has also been used problematically to reinforce stereotypes and reify culture of poverty stereotypes.[75] Xan's reflection on the discomfort of occupying those spaces where their Puerto Rican and trans identities come into friction, underlies the ways that gender and sexuality can work in tandem with other identities to shape diasporic belonging.

For some, Florida represented a departure from these gendered expectations and the homophobia they faced back in Puerto Rico.[76] Places like Pulse nightclub became a safe haven for many LGBTQ Latinxs, including Alejandra, who feared being outed on the archipelago. In fact, Pulse was the first gay nightclub she visited when she arrived in Orlando. She recalled:

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pleneros, I heard him say, "*la mujeres le gustan que la maltratan*" (women like to be mistreated).

[75] A static view of the concept may also ignore the ways in which migration can also transform gender expectations.

[76] Yolanda, who we meet later in this chapter, conveyed this idea. Upon retiring, she wished to move her aging mother from Puerto Rico to New York, so that she could better care for her. While her mother refused, insisting that it was much too cold, Yolanda resisted the idea of moving to Puerto Rico to be with her. "I'm queer as a 3-dollar bill," she said, "I have no business in Puerto Rico. They are still very homophobic out there." The "unhappy medium" was a move to Florida.

> I used to go and I used to sit in the corner and just watch everybody dance and have a couple of drinks and just unwind without speaking to anybody. Sometimes I would just enjoy seeing how everybody else had a blast and that was enough for me because I wasn't ready to be on the dance floor. I was depressed. I was sad but seeing them and seeing couples how they looked at each other gave me *esperanza, como* (hope, like) it is real. What I'm feeling now is not permanent, love does exist, I see it right now. Losing Pulse was awful because every club has its own vibe, even though they might all be gay clubs, they all might celebrate Latin night. I don't know what it was about Pulse that it just felt different and it felt like being in a safe place. For real.

While the idea of "safe space" has recently become ubiquitous with debates around free speech, especially on college campuses, the term has a much richer history. Kenney (2001) traces the development of the idea of safe space back to the gay and lesbian bar scene of the 1960s in Los Angeles and other parts of the United States where sodomy laws, which expressly discriminated against LGBTQ persons, were still in effect. Safe spaces, therefore, became a place to "permit and affirm one's own way of being" (Kenney 2001, 10), providing a respite, albeit temporarily, from homophobia. The term was also picked up by black feminist scholars who defined safe spaces as "social spaces where Black women speak freely" (Collins 2000, 100). Similarly, "safe houses," such as ethnic studies centers and cultural houses, have acted as sites for intellectual exchange and belonging in institutional settings that have traditionally marginalized underrepresented students (Rosaldo 1993). These spaces of free discourse are imperative not only to community building, but also to the resistance of oppression. In this way, safe spaces are political and important to discussions of activism, especially for those located at the boundaries or race, class, gender, and/or sexuality.

But what happens when safe spaces become unsafe? Historically, "safe" spaces have not always been free of violence, policing, and other forms of harm, as evidenced by Pulse, Stonewall Inn, and the deluge of school shootings. Yet the loss of safe space manifests itself in other ways. As Emmanuel, a survivor of Pulse who attributed the tragedy with transforming him into an "organizer/activist" pointed out, Pulse had the consequence of outing several people.

"A lot of people came out because they were plastered all over the news, as they were there, they were there. It was all over on camera. We had people whose families found out because they saw them on the news and they're calling them. And other people can't tell their family they were there, even though they want to be able to talk to somebody about it because they tell us that they might as well be one of the victims because their families would not" Emmanuel paused, before finding the words to continue. "So it brings out the rampant *machista* homophobia that's still there no matter all the progress that we can achieve on one side, there's still, for some people it's more difficult. All of that was put out there. Bright spotlight."

Like the father who refused to accept his son's body from the morgue, these instances epitomize various forms of displacement - from society, the archipelago, and from supposedly safe spaces where individuals were once free to live out their intersectional identities. But forged out of displacement and loss, was another space – one that responds to the moniker, or rather misnomer, of "Orlando United."

The Crisis of Language and the Language of Crisis

OneOrlando Fund

I arrived at the Amway Center at 11 a.m. on Thursday, August 4, 2016 to volunteer as a translator for the first of two OneOrlando Fund town hall meetings. The OneOrlando Fund was created by Orlando's mayor, Buddy Dyer, to provide financial support to victim's families and survivors of Pulse following the tragedy. The purpose of the town hall meetings was to explain the process of filing claims and allocating funds. The news vans were already lining up along the street, as I joined the small crowd standing by the entrance who were locked out of the building. After finally being let in, I approached the other volunteers, who were in the process of getting a

tour of the facility. We concluded the tour in the main lobby where a long row of rectangular tables and chairs were already set up. Volunteers were asked to sit in pairs, with one English speaker and one Spanish speaker. I volunteered to serve as a "greeter" in the arena where the meeting would be held, directing attendees on where to sit and letting them know about the designated seating area for those who did not want to appear on camera.

People began to stream into the arena. Many wearing t-shirts printed with the photographs of loved ones they lost that night. Others were visibly injured, supported by canes or wheelchairs. Survivors and victims' families from other mass shootings, such as Aurora and Santa Barbara, were also in the room. During a portion of the program, they addressed the audience, saying they were there to make sure "that doesn't happen to you" - a reference to the fact that much of the donations collected did not make it to them or the families of victims. Some left the room in tears, escorted by a friend or empathetic stranger. The air felt thick and heavy.

The somberness was cut by the sharpness of the fund administrator attorney Ken Feinberg's words. Feinberg, who also presided over the dispensation of funds for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, explained very matter-of-factly that the money would go to three groups of people: (1) the families of those killed, (2) those who were injured and required hospitalization or out-patient care, and (3) those who were in the nightclub who did not suffer physical injuries (OneOrlando Fund Draft Protocol 2016). In the case of the last category, presence in the nightclub would have to be confirmed by law enforcement records. There were some mumbles around the room. During the audience Q&A, it became clear that there were some survivors who escaped and immediately fled the scene, never seeking medical attention or contacting law enforcement officials. Perhaps it was the adrenaline, or the fear of being outed for

their sexual orientation or documentation status. Would they be eligible to receive the funds? The answer was unclear.

The town hall meeting which I attended that morning was conducted almost entirely in English. While headsets were made available for speakers of other languages to hear translations of the day's proceedings, not everyone grabbed a headset or were even aware of their existence. Almost an hour and a half into the meeting, Mariana, one of the co-founders of *Somos*, approached the microphone during the Q&A portion to announce that free resources, such as legal counsel and mental health counseling in Spanish, would be provided for free through *Proyecto Somos Orlando*. Only then did someone announce to the audience that they were free to pose questions in Spanish. I thought back to those early responses to the tragedy by the national media and, as I will discuss in the next section, by the city of Orlando. The blind spots, were almost too glaring to ignore.

"Olvidate desa Mesa!": The Making of Somos Orlando

It was a Tuesday morning when I arrived at Monica's home, which was located in a gated community in East Orlando. She was finishing up some work on her laptop at her kitchen table, while her two children watched cartoons in the living room. Monica was born in New York, but she moved to Puerto Rico at the age of 8. She returned to New York as an adult where she enjoyed a successful career in advertising and marketing for several years before making the move to Orlando. Upon losing her job, Monica started her own consultation business with a strong focus on diversity, providing cultural competency trainings for corporations, among other

things.[77] She was well known in the business community and was the current president of a professional women's association. Monica replied to my e-mail request for an interview almost immediately, inviting me into her home. We wasted no time getting started as I scrambled to turn on my tape recorder. I had not even broached the topic of Pulse, when she began recalling:

> That day I woke up and I heard the news and I was in such a state of shock. I was feeding the kids, just like today, and already by 10:30 my husband's like, "Monica, you got to go right?" And I said, "Yeah, I got to go." He says, "Where you going?" And I said, "I don't know where I'm going, but I need to get out of here" . . . And I got in the car and all of a sudden my girlfriends start calling me, "Monica, Monica, hey, where you going? I'm on my way." I'm like, yeah, I don't know where to go. I'm going to go to the LGBT Center. I was on my way. I got there first, since I'm like twenty minutes from downtown, and I got there and I bumped into another colleague, a leader. We were all Boricuas too and all women. You know, it's crazy. So I bump into her and I'm like what's going on here? She's like, no, there's no one here, in the sense of the families. And I'm like, yeah, it was Latin night. She's like, yeah, I think all the families are at the Hampton Inn. So, we rushed over there. I called the other girls and I told them don't even bother coming here, go to the Hampton Inn. We went over there and that's when we realized, it was confirmed just by walking in and seeing all the brown faces that this was more than just an LGBTQ tragedy, it was a Latino tragedy. When you have law enforcement making announcements about how the families are going to be moving from there to another center and they only do it in English, we're like excuse me, you need to repeat all that . . . *La gente estaba como, "Que fue lo que dijo* [People were like, "What did they say"]?" Like lost. In the midst of their anguish, to add insult to injury, they were completely lost and confused.

A bilingual police officer eventually stepped in to serve as a translator, but only after Monica demanded that the information be repeated in Spanish.

Yolanda, one of the other co-founders of *Somos* painted a similar scene at the at LGBTQ Center and the hospital when I met with her for the first time at the newly opened office of *Proyecto Somos Orlando*. The space was bright, with natural light pouring in the rooms and highlighting the freshly painted accent walls. Yolanda who was born and raised in the Bronx, New York and rose through the ranks of the NYPD, moved to Florida upon her "retirement." She

[77] Monica also began planning and hosting "*Talleres de Bienvenida*," workshops for newly arrived migrants.

had obtained a degree in social work and was an advocate for promoting mental health awareness and access to care. Yolanda was on her way to church when she heard news about the shooting at Pulse. She headed straight to the hospital and then LGBT+ Center Orlando (The Center). She recalled:

> There were very few people who looked like me at the Center and all you kept hearing was LGBT, LGBT. For me having been in both spots it's like, no, *Latino* LGBT, *Latino* LGBT. My head was exploding, my hair was on fire angry. Not even the hospital in 2016, you can't find someone to talk to these people in Spanish and in English. Both languages are urgent. And when I asked the only Latino commissioner for the city why isn't anything being said in Spanish, why aren't they mentioning the Latino community, the answer was: Because we weren't the only ones there. So, for the sake of the four or five, for the handful, you sacrifice your own people? You're Boricua too. You leave them feeling emotionally distended. I had to remind him to repeat everything in Spanish when they asked the families to move to the Hampton Inn.

The privileging of English by the city of Orlando and other first responders, that Monica and Yolanda describe above, speaks to the existence linguistic borders that ultimately inhibit access to key information and resources in times of crisis. Taken together, these scenes point to the ways that language marks public spheres of belonging, positioning Spanish as "out of place" in public spaces (Urciuoli 1996, 35). Yolanda's account, in particular, also highlights how intersectional identities shape belonging and movement through spaces. While the Center was quite active in the LGBTQ community, they had little experience providing bilingual and bicultural services. Her observation that there were few people that looked like her, a queer person of color, at the Center speaks to the circulation and normalization of whiteness in queer spaces, a phenomenon that queer theorists of color have critiqued in their works (Eng et. al. 2005; Hames-García and Martínez 2011; Manalansan 2003; Muñoz 1999; Perez 2005).[78]

[78] Even in non-white spaces where Spanish is the dominant medium of communication, the crisis of language manifests itself in other ways. For instance, Xan was frustrated by the misgendering they experienced at Puerto Rico Day, after being called "*mama, chica, ella*, her" by other Puerto Ricans on the trip. But as Xan explains of the Spanish language and its relation to intersectional

Mariana, who at the time was the director of the Florida branch of a major national Latinx non-profit organization, was one of the first people Yolanda called when she got news of the tragedy. She appealed to Mariana to use her organization's clout to get involved. Mariana and Yolanda were both supposed to be at Pulse the night of the shooting to run a voter registration event as part of the effort to increase civic participation among the Latinx community. The event was post-postponed for unrelated reasons, but they now found themselves trying to organize a response to the what they perceived were the main problems of that day.

"There were two things that happened," Mariana explained. "One is that the mainstream media and local officials here really weren't talking about the fact that it was Latin night, they weren't talking about the fact that it was a primarily Latino population and then later on we learned mostly Puerto Rican." She continued, "We got together to help change the narrative and make sure that not only the entire world at that point, since all eyes were on Orlando, understood that this was mostly a Latino community but that there were very specific needs and strengths to that."

Mariana, Yolanda, and Monica, along with a handful of other Latina leaders from the community, all ended up at the Hampton Inn later that night to reflect on these issues and devise a plan of action.[79] They concluded that the immediate needs would most likely be met by the city, so they decided to focus instead on long term goals. Yolanda described that initial meeting:

> We were sitting at a table trying to decide what to do and I said let me tell you about trauma. It took me seven years of treatment to learn to deal with my PTSD because you never cure PTSD, you live with it for the rest of your life, but you learn to live with it.

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identities: "If you don't have anything gender neutral in your language, how can you conceptualize gender neutrality and how can you conceptualize equality if things of authority are disproportionally gendered he?"

[79] There was a fourth co-founder of *Somos*, who unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to speak with and has since left Orlando.

> Whatever they do with the million they raised overnight, whatever they do with that money is never going to be enough . . . Five years from now, when there is abuse, suicides, no one is going to ask did you have something to do with Pulse.

Yolanda was a 9/11 first responder who was standing by the foot of one of the towers as it came down. By bringing up her own personal struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), she points to other gaps that go beyond the issue of language and short-term monetary responses like the OneOrlando Fund. While survivors and first responders might grapple with the longstanding effects of PTSD, others like Alejandra struggled with survivor's guilt. She lost her driver's license the night before the shooting and was unable to accompany a friend, who died that early morning. She asked, "Why the hell am I here for? Why did he not make it and I did?"

Mental health was a central concern for those organizing to help survivors in the days and months following Pulse. According to the State of Mental Health in America 2018 report (Mental Health America 2018) Florida ranks 44th in access to mental health care, which includes measures such as "access to insurance, access to treatment, quality and cost of insurance, access to special education, and workforce availability" (13). Following Pulse, I attended several forums on mental health and met with mental healthcare providers, who were working with survivors and their loved ones. Across those interviews and events, one key term kept coming up: "cultural competency." As Alexis, a social worker and reproductive rights activist who identifies as part of the LGBTQ community, explained:

> I didn't realize how much people didn't understand the culture because we think about what cultural competency is and it's like a buzz word. It doesn't mean anything. There's no like, there's no scale of like this is how culturally competent you are, especially in the mental health field. It's a checkbox. Go to a one-day training and like somehow, you're culturally competent. That's how they make that happen. So, I made this connection later on, especially when I started to do this work. I'm like this is a check box because all these people are saying they're culturally competent … I'm finding more and more like the intricacies of what it means to be culturally competent and what my role and how important it is for me to have a seat at the table, for me to be involved in the conversation that affects the community that I'm a part of. My thought, especially just working

> different jobs in mental health, it's like you want someone that speaks Spanish right, but you want someone who's going to translate the forms for you, who's going to answer every single Spanish phone call for you, who if somebody walks through the door who's Spanish they belong to you, problems that aren't yours belong to you. But there's no emphasis on actually learning or for the whole office or for the organization to learn.

The framing of cultural competency as little more than a checkbox emphasizes the superficiality of cultural competency approaches within organizational settings. As Hale (2006) argues in his assessment of neoliberal multiculturalism, "a progressive response to past societal ills has a menacing potential to perpetuate the problem in a new guise" (12). The seemingly progressive move to become "culturally competent," without any real investment in equity and inclusivity, like the language of "multiculturalism" (Melamed 2006), does little more than reinforce capitalist projects by increasing profits and boosting a company's image.

Eliana, who arrived in Orlando from Puerto Rico twenty years ago, headed a local counseling center which opened its doors as a crisis intervention center following Pulse. She painted a much more complex picture of culturally competency that went beyond the surface level approaches that Alexis described. She argued for the importance of a "cultural competency model" for Latinx families in a mental health capacity. When asked to described what she me meant by cultural competency, Eliana explained:

> *Cultural competency, por ejemplo, una familia que me llama la mama que su hijo estaba allí y yo llego a la casa, tengo que pasar dos horas hablando con la mama y el sobreviviente no quire verte. That's ok. Tienes que ir una segunda ves, tienes que ir una tercera ves hasta la persona te ve and then you're in. Después que te tomas dies cafes, que pasas varias sesiones en la casa, que hablas con la mama, que hablas con la tia, que hablas con la prima, que hablas con la vecina, hasta por fin que esa persona te da la oportunidad de tu trabajar con el y que tu le demuestras que realmente tu estas allí porque tu quieres trabajar con el, no porque tu quieres hacer un reportaje, no porque quieres exponer lo, si no porque tu quieres ayudar esa persona pa que el sea lo mejor que puede hacer. That's what I mean. No es una sesione y ya. no toma 45 minutos como quizás unas de las agencias quieren que hagamos, que solamente nos dan 45 minutes, no 50, 50 minuto, 8 sesiones. that's not going to work. No estamos trabajando con una ciudacion normal in the sense that no es algo que pasa a menudo. No es un niño que tenga ADHD que tu puedes ver en 50 minutos y trabajar con el en self-control. Son unas*

> *personas que han pasados por un momento bien difícil, bien critico, bien diferente that they will need long term care . . .* and not only for those survivors but for their families that are dealing with those survivors. For us as a community, I think that we are impacted too. *Todos los hispanos que yo conozco, conocen a alguien* or they know somebody who knows somebody.
>
> Cultural competency, for example, a family whose mother calls me because her son was there and I get to the house and I have to spend two hours talking with the mother and the survivor doesn't want to see you. That's ok. You have to go a second time, you have to go a third time until the person sees you and then you're in. After you've drank ten coffees, after various sessions in the house, after you've spoken with the mother, after you've spoken with the aunt, after you've spoken with the cousin, after you've spoken with the neighbor, and finally that person gives you the opportunity to work with him and you've demonstrated to him that you are really there because you want to work with him and not because you want to write a report, not because you want to expose them, but because you want to help that person so he can be the best he can be. That's what I mean. It's not one session and that's it. It's doesn't take 45 minutes like one of the agencies we work with wants us to take, they only give us 45 minutes, no 50, 50 minutes, 8 sessions. That's not going to work. We are not working with a normal population in the sense that this doesn't happen often. It's not a child that has ADHD and you can see them in 50 minutes and work with him on self-control. These are people that have gone through a very difficult moment, very critical, very different that will need long term care . . . and not only for those survivors but for their families that are dealing with those survivors. For us as a community, I think that we are impacted too. All the Hispanics I know, know someone or they know somebody who knows somebody. [80]

The scene Eliana describes of a counselor drinking her weight in coffee and meeting with several members of a potential client's family, before finally being granted access, is in stark contrast to approaches that reduce cultural competency to language or a set of skills which can be learned (Kleinman and Benson 2006). Eliana's assessment aligns more closely to Fitzgerald's (2000) rendering of cultural competency as "the ability to analyze and respond to the 'cultural scenes' (Spradley and McCurdy 1972) and 'social dramas' (Turner 1974) of everyday life in ways that are cultural and psychologically meaningful for all the people involved" (184).

[80] Eliana also posited that the "media is retraumatizing" survivors with their coverage of the shooting. Her statement has continued relevance given the release of body cam footage, with no trigger warning, months after the attack.

In addition to mental healthcare services, the women of *Somos* decided that bilingual legal services were also needed in the community. While Puerto Ricans did not have to grapple with issues of documentation, securing visas was a point of concern for other Latinxs affected by the tragedy. As Mariana explained during our conversation, "We wanted to . . . make sure that people understood that there were going to be funerals and burials abroad, so people were going to need visas . . . and that you needed to know what rights people have as undocumented."

From those conversations that night at the Hampton Inn, *Somos Orlando* was born. The women reached out to their contacts and eventually organized over twenty Puerto Rican and Latinx organizations under the moniker. The next morning, they called a "Unity Press Conference" outside of the offices of Hispanic Federation to bring widespread attention to the significance of the tragedy for the Latinx LGBTQ community. The ultimate goal of the project was to create a center to house these bilingual services. As Monica affirmed, "Here in Central Florida, *con tan grande poblacion Hispana* (with such a large Hispanic population), and there is not one place where people can go to as a safe haven where they can get in-culture, in-language, and now LGBT friendly services too, all under one roof."

But while Puerto Ricans were disproportionately affected by the shooting at Pulse, not all Puerto Rican and Latinx-led non-profit and grassroots organizations rushed to get involved with the same enthusiasm as they did for other tragedies, such as Hurricane Maria. Mariana was critical of this, sharing, "I said this in front of the Puerto Rican leadership yesterday, that its really interesting how the same folks that I would say are the leaders of the Latino and Puerto Rican community, not many of you have been involved with *Somos*, and that says a lot about LQBTQ issues. So, everybody was like, ok. And I'm like, yes, it has to be said because those are our issues as well, as is gun violence, and all the issues that affect our community."

Mariana's words echoed some my own initial observations regarding the presence (or rather lack of) of heteronormative Latinx leadership at town halls, forums, and other events concerning Pulse. Moreover, not everyone was confident about the possibility of realizing the vision for the project. For instance, there were those who argued that they first needed to secure a "seat at the table" within existing institutions, pointing to past exclusionary experiences that devalued Latinx expertise. Monica recalled during one of those early planning meetings:

> It got really heated. They are like…we need a place at the table, a place at the table. They got heated. There were maybe like 30 organizations represented. And I got up and I said, 'You know what? *Olvidate de esa mesa* (forget about that table). Forget about it. Look at this table that we're creating here.

Despite these struggles, in the end, they did create that table. The women came up with a preliminary budget of $600,000 for securing a space and equipping it with resources and personnel. Because of their organizational connections with Hispanic Federation, which is a national non-profit organization with offices in New York, Washington D.C., Connecticut, and Florida, *Somos* was able to secure the initial funds needed to lease a building on S. Orange Blossom Trail. Almost a month later, they received another major boost of support in the form of the song, "Love Make the World Go Round," by Jennifer Lopez and Lin Manuel Miranda.[81] For the first three months, the artists donated all of the proceeds from the song on iTunes to the *Somos Orlando* fund.[82] But by the time I finished my fieldwork, the women were no longer running the organization, which was subsumed by its largest funder, Hispanic Federation, and was now, as some follow-up conversations seemed to indicate, a largely homonormative Latinx space.

[81] Lin Manuel-Miranda, most notably known for the Broadway musicals "Hamilton" and "In the Heights," is the son of Hispanic Federation's founder, Luis Miranda Jr.

[82] There is some controversy over how much of the song's profits were actually received.

While the future of *Somos* remains unclear, its establishment is important in so far as it not only points to the refusal to be erased from the public narrative surrounding Pulse, but it is also the material embodiment of the demand for services for the Latinx LGBTQ community and their families. This evokes what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1994) describes as cultural citizenship:

> The right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others. (402)

As scholars have shown, this framework centers modes of belonging beyond juridical citizenship and considers everyday challenges to exclusionary practices (Cisneros 2014; Flores and Benmayor 1997; Galvez 2009; Ong 1999; Rosaldo 1997). For instance, in their study of El Barrio Popular Education Program in East Harlem, Benmayor et. al. (1997) demonstrated the ways in which Puerto Rican women living in poverty challenged oppressive social structures through demands for dignity and respect.

If we return momentarily to the idea of creating the table, the right to be different and to belong manifests itself not in a participatory democratic sense, but through the forging of new spaces of belonging in response to exclusionary practices. As Alejandra put it:

> It [*Somos*] was the start of my own healing. And I started doing art nights with *Proyecto Somos Orlando* . . . I started meeting survivors. It felt like being at home or when you get together for a *bautismo* (baptism) or a Christmas dinner and you're just talking with your family. It was so painful at first but it felt so much better . . . Everything is different, even the way I breathe feels different.

Her words at once reminded me of Ahmed's (2013) reflection on the importance of considering "how to protect ourselves (and those around us) from being diminished" and of "create[ing] spaces of relief, spaces that might be breathing spaces" (para. 7). *Somos* not only provided a

physical space for LGBTQ Latinxs and their families to receive essential services, but it also created a space to breathe.

Conclusion

Figure 22: Interim Memorial around what once was Pulse nightclub. Photo by author, 2018.

Almost two years after the shooting, I walk alongside the temporary memorial at the site of Pulse nightclub with my 8-month-old son. The sound of cars speeding down Orange Avenue fades into the distance as I follow the curved wall – a giant collage of photographs capturing the vigils, memorials, signs, artwork, and faces of Orlando. Behind a clear glass section of the wall, I find the names of the 49:

Stanley Almodovar III
Amanda Alvear
Oscar A Aracena-Montero
Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala
Antonio Davon Brown
Darryl Roman Burt II
Angel L. Candelario Padro
Juan Chevez-Martinez
Luis Daniel Conde
Cory James Connell
Tevin Eugene Crosby
Deonka Deidra Drayton
Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez
Leroy Valentin Fernandez
Mercedez Marisol Flores
Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz
Juan Ramon Guerrero
Paul Terrell Henry
Frank Hernandez
Miguel Angel Honorato
Javier Jorge-Reyes
Jason Benjamin Josaphat
Eddie Jamoldroy Justice
Anthony Luis Laureano Disla
Christopher Andrew Leinonen
Alejandro Barrios Martinez
Brenda Lee Marquez McCool
Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez
Kimberly Morris
Akyra Monet Murray
Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo,
Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera
Joel Rayon Paniagua
Jean Carlos Mendez Perez
Enrique L. Rios Jr.
Jean C. Nives Rodriguez
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado
Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz
Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan
Edward Sotomayor Jr,
Shane Evan Tomlinson
Martin Benitez Torres
Jonathan Antonio Camuy Vega
Juan P. Rivera Velazquez
Luis S. Vielma
Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez
Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon
Jerald Arthur Wright

On my way out, I stop again to read the sign at the entrance. Written in both English and Spanish, the inscription read: “On June 12, 2016, 49 angels sought the joy, love and acceptance of Pulse Nightclub. Instead, they found hatred. And they never came home. They were gay. They were straight. Latin, black, white. Mothers. Brothers. Sisters. Daughters. Sons. Lost forever.” But in the wake of Pulse, there was another tragedy - one that silenced and erased queer brown and black bodies from the local and national stage of mourning and loss.

This chapter has explored the ways in which the multiple subject positions of Puerto Ricans living in Orlando shape belonging both locally and across transnational borders. It has also demonstrated the ways that the actions of the media and the city of Orlando reveal an implicit privileging of whiteness. The founding of *Somos* was ultimately both a deliberate affirmation of Latinx identity and a refusal to be erased and silenced by the normalization of whiteness within the umbrella term LGBTQ. As the late Esteban Jose Muñoz (2009) ascertained in his conceptualization of queer futurity, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). It is this idea of potentiality that engenders hope – a reimaging of what could be.

CHAPTER 5

ASSEMBLAGES OF CITIZENSHIP:

WORTH, COMMUNITY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF DISASTER

> Aftershocks remind us that disasters are not singular events but ongoing processes.
>
> - Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*

On February 8, 2019, an article appeared in the online version of the Spanish language newspaper *El Nuevo Día* with the headline: "*Boricuas que migraron a Florida tras el huracán María sintieron discrimen de sus compatriotas*" (Pérez 2019). The article referred to a study conducted by the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, which found that Puerto Rican evacuees in Orlando experienced more difficulties when it came to housing, employment, and transportation than their counterparts in Miami. The authors also explained that evacuees in Orlando encountered more "hostility" from other Puerto Ricans in the area (Scaramutti et. al. 2019). The article quickly circulated on social media and was posted to the "Boricuas en Orlando" Facebook page, attracting a number of comments. While some posters suggested that evacuees should have been better prepared to make the move to Orlando, others, like the following poster, expressed their disappointment about how Puerto Ricans were being received by other Boricuas:

> Wow! *Eso si esta triste*! That is a damn shame. It saddens me and shames me that my fellow Puerto Ricans that have been here 10 or 20 plus years would react with hostility and forget how hostile Central Florida was for us 20 or so years ago. How far we have come since then here.

As I continued to scroll through the comments section, I was reminded of a conversation I had with a nurse named Eduardo, who had left Puerto Rico nearly three decades ago. As we sat in the lobby of the hospital where he worked, discussing his early adjustment to life in Orlando, Eduardo told me:

> This is something that you probably already heard before, but one thing that I don't like from, if I can call my people, from Puerto Rico, we don't help each other and it's very clear to me. Yes, the person that helped me to move here was my friend [who] is Puerto Rican, but that's because I knew him from the time I was a child. Otherwise, I don't see that the Puerto Rican people get together like other people do to help each other. I see Cubans get together and they move the planet if they have to. Sometimes Dominicans they get together. Venezuelans they get together. Puerto Ricans, very hardly you see that. They are always fighting for something. They fight among each other…Sometimes you don't feel the support from them. It's unfortunate.

Eduardo was right about one thing - I had heard this before. In fact, several Puerto Ricans I spoke with both formally and informally suggested that Puerto Ricans were the first to "cut each other down" or look the other way. According to Ramos-Zayas (2004), Puerto Ricans experience "delinquent citizenship" and must continually prove their worthiness, despite their nominal citizenship.[83] These discursive constructions of Puerto Ricans as hostile or unsupportive function as yet another iteration of delinquency that is positioned not only in relation to the United States, but also to broader ideas of a Puerto Rican "nation" or "community."

But the activist landscape in Orlando paints a different picture - one that serves as counter-narrative to these tropes. Both before and after Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017 as a category 4 storm, Puerto Ricans in Orlando had been "fighting for something," although not in the way that Eduardo meant. By foregrounding organizational and grassroots relief efforts, as well as the cultural products of activism, this chapter demonstrates not only the importance of the diaspora in Orlando to post-Maria recovery, but also

[83] Ramos-Zayas (2004) draws a parallel between "delinquent citizenship" and the status of "illegality" that other Latinxs experience.

to scholarly understandings of citizenship and belonging within the context of disaster and recovery. How is citizenship configured and articulated by Puerto Rican activists in the post-Maria moment? On the one hand, I find that Puerto Rican activists in Orlando engage in what Ramos-Zayas (2003) has referred to as the "politics of worthiness," that is "the tacit and explicit insistence that Puerto Ricans, and the Puerto Rican poor in particular, must prove their deservingness of US citizenship in order to be legitimately entitled to civil rights and social benefits that other – particularly white male – populations can assume as inalienable" (10). On the other hand, while Puerto Ricans assert worthiness and belonging in relation to the U.S. nation-state, they must also, as the opening vignette indicates, prove their worthiness in relation to a larger transnational Puerto Rican community. The idea of worthiness, however, takes on added meaning in a post-disaster context, as Puerto Ricans struggle to prove themselves as not only worthy of aid, but also of the right to live. It is here that I begin.

The "Real Catastrophe"

I met with Yolanda, a local activist in Orlando, at a crowded Panera Bread by the Florida Mall. It had been more than a year since I first interviewed her about her work in the Latinx LGBTQ community following the shooting at Pulse nightclub (see Chapter 4). As we sipped our soups, she told me about her cousin in Puerto Rico who had down syndrome. He had developed a bed sore and his family was struggling to get him medical care after the hurricane. Fortunately, they had some military connections and arranged to have him transported to the hospital ship "The Comfort." But things did not go according to plan. Yolanda explained:

> They moved him from Luquillo, which is in the upper right-hand corner of the archipelago. They moved him across the northern edge to the middle to Manati military preparation . . . At that point we all knew no one was going to The Comfort . . . Instead they moved him to Aguadilla. Now you're in the opposite corner of the island. Now my

> uncle is 93. He's traveling all across the island in a rotten Humvee. It's not like the hummers you use here with the cute seats. It's like riding inside of a can of Coca-Cola with four tires rattling around. So they move him to the other side, they get to the hospital and . . . they put him in a mash unit . . . By nightfall they tell him you got to go home because this isn't a hospital, you can't stay here. And my uncle just broke down crying. He's a veteran of World War II, Korea, and he couldn't believe that this country was treating him like that . . . So into the Humvee again and all the way home.

Yolanda eventually flew to Puerto Rico and arranged a flight to bring her cousin to the United States for further treatment. By the time she got there, the military had again intervened:

> They got a donor for the flight. They take him to the VA hospital until the flight. And I said, "*Tio* (uncle), he's not going anywhere. I know this game" . . . "No, no, they said that they'd fly us out." Alright. I cancelled everything. Sure enough, oh, he's in a hospital, he's being taken care of, no need. He died last week. He wasn't dying when I saw him. He wasn't. He was hurting . . . They would say it was his medical condition from before. They will never say it had anything to do with traveling across the island. This storm has taken a lot out of us . . . If you had any doubt about whether or not the United States has any love for Puerto Rico - well, yes they do. They love Puerto Rico, but they hate us, the people that live there.

Unfortunately, this story is far from an anomaly, despite the claims of a U.S. president who believes that Hurricane Maria was not a "real catastrophe" like Hurricane Katrina and that Puerto Ricans should be "proud" of their death count.[84] While the Department of Public Safety initially accredited only 64 deaths to Hurricane Maria, supporting the illusion that Maria was not as devastating as it actually was, a study conducted by researchers at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health (2018) attributed 2,975 excess deaths to Hurricane Maria. Most recent reports, however, estimate that the death toll is now closer to 4645 (Kishore et. al. 2018). The initial death count failed to take into account those who died as a result of post-hurricane conditions, such as the lack of power to operate medical equipment or the inability to access adequate health care or clean drinking water. Suicide rates in Puerto Rico

[84] On October 3, 2017 at Luis Muñiz Air National Guard Base in Carolina, Puerto Rico, during his first visit after Hurricane Maria made landfall, Trump drew a distinction between Hurricanes Maria and Katrina, suggesting that Maria was not a "real catastrophe" like Katrina. He then told Puerto Rican officials they should be "proud" of their death count.

have also increased post-Maria. According to a report by the Commission for the Prevention of Suicide (2018), there has been a 29 percent increase in reported suicides from 2016 to 2017. The report also found that 26 people committed suicide in November 2017 alone, overwhelmingly men.[85] To this day, Puerto Ricans are still dying from hurricane related conditions.

When I sat down to write my field notes that night, all I could write was one question: "Does 'crisis' constitute a biopolitical project?" (Field notes, January 3, 2018). Foucault (2003) notoriously defines biopower as the power to "'make' live and 'let' die" (241). Yolanda's assertion that the United States "love(s) Puerto Rico, but they hate us," alludes not only to the geopolitical aspects of colonialism (Bonilla 2017; Grosfoguel 1997), which have historically positioned Puerto Rico as a desirable military outpost, but also points to the vulnerability and disposability of Puerto Rican lives. As United States citizens, Puerto Ricans constitute a particular subset of the population - a body of the population which is subject to U.S. regulation and discipline. This subset, for all intents and purposes, is left to die, as in the case of Yolanda's cousin above.[86]

Drawing on Foucault, as well as decolonial thought, Agamben (1998) presents the idea of a "state of exception." Using the example of the concentration camp, he argues, "Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation" (Agamben 1998, 171). In the camp, laws are suspended by the sovereign, transforming the site into a state of exception - "an anomic space in

[85] This points to the gendered dimensions of disaster. Scholars have shown that men and women experience disaster differently (see Enarson and Chakrabarti 2008).

[86] In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault (2003) argues that this act is tantamount to state racism.

which what is at stake is a force of law without law" and human beings are unprotected by citizenship (Agamben 2005, 39). Also closely related and pertinent to the case at hand is Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which expands on the notion of biopower. Mbembe (2003) defines necropolitics as the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (39), positioning the colony as a state of exception that generates terror and controls life. He argues that "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (Mbembe 2003, 12). If we consider Hurricane Maria in relation to other chapters of this dissertation, manifestations of sovereignty can be seen throughout in deployments of social and political power and its effects on everyday life. In the context of Katrina, Giroux (2006) views necropolitics as the "politics of disposability," emphasizing the ways the violence of the neoliberal racial state is embodied through the deaths of already marginalized populations. His analysis rings familiar to the case of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, where the death count and rise of disaster capitalism function as forms of violence. And yet, as Rosas (2012) maintains, there is agency to be found in spaces that generate death.

This section further explores the relationship between these theoretical approaches, crisis, and neoliberalism as a function of colonialism. In a 2012 interview, Agamben explains the role of "crisis" in normalizing "states of exception:"

> These days, the words "crisis" and "economy" are not used as concepts but rather as words of command that facilitate the imposition and acceptance of measures and restrictions that the people would not otherwise accept. Today, "crisis" means, "you must obey!" I think it is very obvious to everyone that the so-called "crisis" has been going on for decades and that it is actually nothing but the normal functioning of capitalism in our time. And there is nothing rational about the way capitalism is now functioning. (Interview with Giorgio Agamben –Pepe Savà 2012)

In this statement, Agamben makes a key connection between the deployment of crisis, biopower, and capitalism. His assertion that crisis "facilitate(s) the imposition and acceptance of measures

and restrictions that the people would not otherwise accept," resonates with the growing body of literature in anthropology and its related disciplines that explores the relationship between neoliberalism and disasters (Adams 2013; Freudenburg et al. 2009; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999; Schuller and Maldonado 2016).

According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is best defined as a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (2). Journalist Naomi Klein (2007) has explored how neoliberalism is sustained by disaster. For instance, she argues that the free market depends on the "power of shock" – that is, the disorientation and chaos following disaster – in order to promote neoliberal ideals of deregulation, privatization, and cuts to social spending.[87] Drawing on the notion of disaster capitalism, I briefly compare a "real catastrophe like Katrina" to Hurricane Maria, suggesting that the "real catastrophe," in part, is the expansion of neoliberalism at the expense of the lives of Puerto Rican people. But while disaster may generate exceptions that allow for the imposition of neoliberal policies people might not otherwise accept, disasters are also social events "with long histories deeply rooted in human, economic, social, environmental and political choices about human and environmental development" (Enarson 2010, 15). In what ways, then, is disaster also an extension of persistent socio-historical and colonial conditions that continue to determine the value of human life in Puerto Rico and its diaspora?

[87] Drawing from Klein's work, Schuller (2008) provides a clear definition of disaster capitalism as the "national and transnational governmental institutions' instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called natural and human-mediated disasters, including post-conflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interests" (20).

Disaster Capitalism: From Katrina to Maria

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in the Gulf Coast as a category 4 hurricane. Within the first twenty-four hours the levee system failed, flooding an estimated 80 percent of New Orleans. But as Adams (2013) writes in her ethnography, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith*, "Katrina was not just 'another' disaster. It was an indictment of the restructuring of America's political economy as well as a visible window into the effects of this restructuring over the long haul" (181). This restructuring heavily depended on what New Orleans' mayor Ray Nagin referred to in a press conference as a recovery process "driven by incentives and a market-driven approach" (Nossiter 2007). The federal government entered no-bid contracts with private companies contracted to aid in the city's reconstruction, often with little to no accountability from the government. What resulted was the funneling of millions of dollars of federal funds into for-profit companies that benefited from their increased stock market value (Adams 2013; Barrios 2017).

The federally funded, state-run Road Home Program was one such example of the neoliberalization of recovery. Managed by Virginia-based company ICF International, the purpose of the program was to provide up to $150,000 in monetary grants for homeowners to rebuild or repair their homes. However, eight months after they were hired, the company had received just over 100,000 applications, but awarded less than 400 grants, igniting critique over the slow dispensation of funds (Deslatte 2007). These neoliberal reforms further exacerbated existing inequalities, resulting in what Adams (2013) refers to as a "second order disaster" (1). For instance, residents in lower income areas received insufficient funds to rebuild their homes (Green and Olshansky 2012), and Black homeowners, in particular, did not receive as much funds compared to their white counterparts (Gotham 2014). This brings to the fore the socio-

spatial dimensions of racialization, as many of the city's largely Black and low-income homeowners and renters were not only displaced but also left without the resources to rebuild.

As with Katrina, Hurricane Maria was far from a "natural" disaster. While Maria, and previously Irma, damaged the power grid, the archipelago's infrastructure was already suffering. Prior to the hurricanes, the Puerto Rico Electrical Power Authority (PREPA) was operating at a $9 billion deficit, crippled by austerity measures, which included cuts in public spending and layoffs (see Chapter 2). The company is also dependent on imported oil, which is subject to market fluctuations. Ultimately, Maria just accelerated the collapse of an already weak power grid, leaving 95% of the archipelago in the dark. In order to restore the power grid, PREPA entered a 300-million-dollar no-bid contract with Whitefish Energy Holdings, a little-known company from Montana. The company billed PREPA $319 an hour for linemen, who were paid a fraction of that at $63 an hour (Smith 2017). Amid increasing criticisms, PREPA withdrew from the contract just weeks later. This was not the end of the controversy surrounding PREPA. In late January 2018, Governor Rosselló announced plans to sell PREPA to private companies. He described a privatization process which would occur in three phases, referring to it as a transition to a "consumer-centered model."

The governor also announced plans for education reform that included the closing of 300 public schools, with the introduction of charter schools and school vouchers. Puerto Rico's Education Secretary Julia Keleher, a non-Puerto Rican appointed by Rosselló, went on to compare the plan on social media to the overhaul of the school system in New Orleans post-Katrina in a tweet that read: "Sharing info on Katrina as a point of reference; we should not underestimate the damage or the opportunity to create new, better schools" (Keleher 2017).[88] In

[88] In July 2019, Keleher was arrested on federal fraud charges.

New Orleans, educational reform began with the firing of 7,500 school employees, including teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodians from the Orleans Parish School Board and was followed with the replacement of neighborhood and magnet schools by three kinds of publicly funded schools: charter schools run by private entities, New Orleans Parish-operated traditional schools, and Recovery School District schools (Michna 2009). Oftentimes masked behind the discourse of school choice, charters and vouchers are key components of the neoliberal agenda, which seeks to transform education into a free market enterprise. In the context of Puerto Rico, however, this is not surprising given the United States' colonial history of intervention in Puerto Rican schooling, which was used as a tool to transform Puerto Ricans into "good" American citizens (Brusi et al. 2018; del Moral 2013).

Although Hurricanes Katrina and Maria both provide examples of how the concept of crisis is deployed as a "blank slate" to advance neoliberal measures, one of the major shortcomings of the framework of disaster capitalism is its often-unilateral focus on what comes after disaster (Schuller and Maldonado 2016). As previously discussed (see Chapter 2), Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States continues to constitute who is deserving of protection and aid. While there are several examples of this after Maria, perhaps none is clearer than the U.S. government's initial refusal to suspend the Jones Act following the hurricane. Under the cabotage provisions of the 1920 Merchant Marine Act, commonly referred to as the Jones Act, all goods transported between U.S. ports must be carried by U.S. vessels owned and operated by U.S. citizens.[89] This policy prohibited foreign boats from delivering food, fuel, and

[89] This is not to be confused with the Jones Act of 1917, which imposed U.S. citizenship on all Puerto Ricans.

Figures 23 and 24: Members of *Misión Boricua* protest the Jones Act at the second annual Women's March at Lake Eola Park. Photos by author, 2018.

other much needed emergency supplies to Puerto Rico in the critical days that followed the hurricane. Puerto Rico currently imports about 85% of its food, paying 20-60 percent more for goods imported from the United States (Nina 2016). Many basic goods were already inaccessible to much of the archipelago, whose median household income equals a little more than half that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the United States. In contrast, the Department of Homeland Security suspended the Jones Act in Texas and Florida almost immediately following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, respectively. While the Jones Act was eventually temporarily suspended in Puerto Rico for ten days, it was not until a full week after Hurricane Maria made landfall.

In sum, as Klein (2018) ascertains in her most recent book, *The Battle for Paradise*, while Puerto Ricans are indubitably experiencing "shock after shock," Hurricane Maria exposes "the archipelago's extreme dependence on imported fuel and food; the unsayable and possibly illegal debt that has been used to impose wave after wave of austerity that gravely weakened the archipelago's defense; and the 130-year-old colonial relationship with a U.S. government that has always discounted the lives of Puerto Rico's Black and Brown people" (12).[90]

On Citizenship, Worth, and Belonging

While citizenship is politicized in terms of legality and "illegality," in its broadest sense, citizenship denotes "belonging to a community, imagined or otherwise" (Castaneda 2006, 144). The interdisciplinary literature on citizenship demonstrates that, although not mutually exclusive of legal status, citizenship encompasses multiple dimensions, such as social inclusion, rights and membership (Bosniak 2000; Caldwell et. al. 2009; Somers 2008). The idea of cultural citizenship, for instance, locates citizenship at the intersections of cultural practice and belonging

[90] In actuality, Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the U.S. spans 122 years.

(see Flores and Benmayor 1997; Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1994). According to Rosaldo (1994), cultural citizenship encompasses the right to full citizenship, despite differences such as race, gender, class or sexual orientation (see also Chapter 4).[91] This resonates with the work of historian Lorrin Thomas (2010), who found that Puerto Ricans in twentieth century New York were in search of dignity and "recognition beyond citizenship" (250).

Social events, such as disasters, coupled with mounting anti-immigrant sentiment, force us to re-confront the question: What does it mean to be a citizen when "even those who are legal residents and citizens, are being re-imagined as less deserving members of the community" (Chavez 2003, 423)? In her ethnographic work on constructions of nationalism in Chicago's Humboldt Park, Ramos-Zayas (2004, 2012) finds that the concept of worthiness is configured around involvement in the military, which is viewed as a mechanism of achieving self-worth. Similarly, Gina Pérez finds that, for its largely Puerto Rican and Latinx participants, the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) becomes a way to prove that "they are good, positive leaders among their peers, and worthy of dignity'' (Pérez 2015, 148). These studies bring to the fore how Puerto Ricans contest their own racialization through social practices and discourses that claim inclusion in the U.S. nation-state.

But it is also important to recognize that the attachments that Puerto Ricans maintain through processes of migration, exodus, and displacement serve to challenge notions of citizenship tied to a singular nation-state (Appadurai 1996; Basch et al. 1994; Bosniak 2000; Ong 1999; Smith 2003). The concept of transnational citizenship, in particular, deterritorializes citizenship and calls to question the relationship between subjects and states (Bauböck 1994;

[91] Aihwa Ong (1996) challenges Rosaldo's conceptualization of cultural citizenship, arguing instead that cultural citizenship is "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society" (738).

Berg and Rodriguez 2013; Fox 2005; Stokes 2004).[92] According to Berg and Rodriguez (2013), transnational citizenship "must be understood as an outcome of sovereignty differentials between states and transnational contestations between states and subjects (both citizen and non-citizen)" (7). This is especially pertinent considering the racialized, gendered, and classed-based inequalities that Hurricane Maria swept to the surface and the forms of social exclusion being experienced by Puerto Rican evacuees to the United States. Lok Siu's (2005) framework of "diasporic citizenship" is particularly analytically productive to the case at hand, as it shows how diasporic belonging is shaped not only by the relationship individuals have to their nation of residence, but also by their relationship to their "ethnic homeland" and the larger United States.

As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, Puerto Rican activism in Orlando is rhizomatically connected, rooted by familial, economic, socio-political, and emotional attachments to Puerto Rico (Aranda 2007; Duany 2011; Pérez 2004). In this way, Hurricane Maria was not a centralized disaster. Its effects were devastating and far reaching, as hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans evacuated to places like Central Florida and those in the diaspora, as I will discuss in the following sections, mobilized to play a hand in the archipelago's recovery and assert their worth.

Neoliberal Citizenship: "A hand up, not a handout"

Many of the activists and community leaders I spoke with were hyperaware of the stigmatization of Puerto Ricans both prior to and following Hurricane Maria. As one community leader told a room of reporters: "I remember when I was a kid in New York, Puerto Ricans got a

[92] I consider transnationalism to describe a process of "disembedding from a set of localized relations in the homeland nation and re-embedding in new overlapping networks that cut across borders" (Ong 2008, 7).

bad name and they're trying to do the same thing here. And I always quote the saying, 'Puerto Ricans want a hand up, not a hand out." The speaker was referring to the racialization of Puerto Ricans that is well documented in traditional diasporic sites, such as New York and Chicago (Fernandez 2012; Findlay 2012; Padilla 1987; Rúa 2010; Sanchez-Korrol 1989).[93] Hurricane Maria ushered in yet another surge of "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1966) narratives, which were directly reflected by the words of a U.S. president who believes that Puerto Ricans "want everything to be done for them" (Trump 2017).[94] The idea of a "hand up," on the contrary, denotes upwards mobility, which becomes characteristic of "good" citizenship in the current neoliberal moment. In their attempts to prove worth and resist culture of poverty ideas, activists, politicians, and other allies at times reinforce neoliberal ideas of citizenship

A "hand up" was precisely the message delivered during a press conference held by the Orlando-arm of Power 4 Puerto Rico, a nation-wide coalition of organizations launched under the Latino Victory Project (LVP) that had formed in order to put pressure on the federal government to address the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Maria through legislative action. It was exactly two months after Hurricane Maria first swept through the archipelago. I arrived at Acacia's *Centro Boriñqueno* and took a seat in the crowd among community members, organizers, and a small group of reporters who had gathered for the press conference. Mariana welcomed the audience and began to explain the purpose of their initiative:

> Central Florida is receiving the vast majority of migrants coming through this exodus, despite our shortage of affordable housing options, among other gaps. As we come upon Thanksgiving, a day where you give thanks, you unite with your family, we should think about the millions of people that have been displaced - that still don't have power, that

[93] For an analysis of racialization in Orlando, see Delerme (2013) and Silver (2013).

[94] The concept of "culture of poverty," as coined by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1966), supposes that intergenerational poverty is a result of shared cultural values and behaviors, such as dependency and feelings of unworthiness.

> still don't have food, that they will not be able to convene with their families and have a traditional Thanksgiving. Instead, Congress has taken a longer break and has not taken action on Puerto Rico. Again, we need to make sure that they hear us loud and clear and that Florida comes to the table as an important factor here.

Mariana's words emphasize the plight of not only those on the archipelago, but also the estimated 56,000 Puerto Ricans who have arrived in Florida in the six months following the storm (Hinojosa et. al. 2018). But while Maria undoubtedly contributed to the recent demographic growth of the region, Puerto Rican migration to Florida did not start, nor will it end, with Maria. Prior to the hurricane, over a million Puerto Ricans were already residing in the state – a migration that was historically facilitated by a number of factors, including military involvement, labor recruitment, and the opening of Walt Disney's theme park (Duany and Silver 2010; Silver 2010; see Introduction). In recent decades, a major push factor has been the economic instability of Puerto Rico, which is experiencing an approximately $74 billion debt and crippling austerity measures (see Chapter 2).

Mariana's statement does more than point to the importance of Orlando as a site of the diaspora. With Thanksgiving just a few days away, her evocation of this quintessential American holiday was both timely and significant. As Siskand (1992) notes:

> In every household that considers itself American or desires to become American, Thanksgiving brings family members back home, ritually strengthening attenuated ties of kinship and investing the set of meanings incorporated in being an American with the emotional intensity and significance of family. (168)

In Orlando, Americanness is oftentimes discursively associated with whiteness, facilitating the othering of black and brown bodies (Delerme 2013). By positioning the Puerto Rican family as the American family, Mariana inserts Puerto Ricans into this racialized landscape.[95] Her

[95] Whether this insertion signifies a browning of the holiday or conversely positions Puerto Ricans as closer to whiteness is up for debate.

emotional appeal that, without action, Puerto Ricans would not be able to partake in a "traditional Thanksgiving" is an attempt to humanize and bring Puerto Ricans to the literal and figurative table.

During the press conference, Congressman Darren Soto, the first person of Puerto Rican descent to represent Florida's 9th Congressional District in Congress, took the analogy a step further, saying:

> You know 400 years ago Pilgrims arrived in the United States in America seeking an opportunity but they faced great struggle, they faced death and their communities faced near starvation, but they came together during that time, during that struggle and went on to flourish. I look at that as what we need to do now here both in Puerto Rico and in Central Florida in our communities.[96]

Congressman Soto's words demonstrate that while neoliberalism is a set of political economic practices that are characterized by deregulation, privatization, and decreased social spending, it also refers to a "common-sense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Harvey 2007, 23). His emphasis on hard work and resilience reflect the neoliberal values that undergird state policies and constructions of "good" (neoliberal) citizenship (Collins et al. 2008; Duggan 2003; Ramos-Zayas 2012). In the context of disaster, the pervasive discourse of resilience functions to shift the onus of recovery away from the state and onto the individual (Adams 2013; Bonilla 2019; Tierney 2015). As Neocleous (2015) argues, "Neoliberal citizenship is nothing if not a training in resilience as the new technology of the self: a training to withstand whatever crisis capital underdoes and whatever political measures the state carries out to save it" (5). A "hand up" and the oft-heard catch phrase that emerged following the storm, "*Puerto Rico se*

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[96] In addition to advancing the settler colonial myth of Thanksgiving, I found the parallel between pilgrims and Puerto Ricans – the colonizer and the colonized – equally disconcerting.

levanta" (Puerto Rico rises), are two sides of the same coin that fund the idea that the "good citizen" is the equivalent of the resilient citizen who goes on to "flourish" in the wake of devastation.[97]

"Adopta un Pueblo"

When she heard the news about Hurricane Maria, Yolanda was lying in a hospital bed in Orlando recovering from a medical condition. A 9/11 first responder, retired police officer, and social worker, Yolanda was all too familiar with the aftermath of crisis and the bureaucratic aspects of relief. Yolanda explained how the idea for *Adopta un Pueblo* was born.

"You can't blindly send stuff. You can't trust that it's going to be given the way you want it given," she said, explaining her reservations about the immediate call for donations from other activists in the community, the "usual suspects," she called them.

She continued, "You heard the stories, the containers were sitting there unopened while FEMA decided they were going to do for the sake of fairness, for whatever reason, they were going to go through everything in them and then hand it out . . . And then there's FEMA food. We don't eat Jello pudding cups in Puerto Rico. Sorry. We don't eat beef jerky but that's what went out."

Yolanda's criticisms were not unfounded. Following the hurricane, images quickly circulated on social media of the food allegedly being delivered by FEMA to Puerto Rico. The packages contained Vienna sausages, Cheeze-it crackers, candy, and other "junk food," leading many to question the nutritional value of the food being distributed. FEMA also awarded a $156 million contract to an Atlanta based contracting company to supply thirty million meals to Puerto

[97] "*Puerto Rico se levanta*" has taken on new meaning with the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló (see Epilogue).

Rico, but only 50,000 were delivered.[98] In February 2018, over in Kissimmee, news broke that a rat infestation had contaminated boxes of donations stored in the PRFAA building that were never sent to the archipelago (Padro-Ocascio 2018).[99] More recently, in January 2020, after a series of earthquakes rocked the archipelago, Puerto Rican residents discovered a warehouse in Ponce with emergency supplies from 2017 that were never distributed.

Figure 25: "For sale" sign in front of PRFAA building in Kissimmee. Photo by author, 2018.

[98] FEMA eventually terminated the contract on October 19, 2017. But this is yet another example of how disaster capitalism operates on the archipelago. At the end of January 2018, FEMA also announced that they would end aid to Puerto Rico, while nearly half a million residents were still in the dark. They later retracted this statement, saying that they would only end new shipments.

[99] Although PRFFA officials denied allegations of an infestation, the area's only regional office closed its doors, later re-opening in Orlando.

Concerned with the mismanagement of supplies and what she described as a lack of cultural awareness, Yolanda decided not to focus on perishable goods. Instead, she brainstormed what she considered to be "long term" solutions. Upon learning that Hurricane Maria had severely damaged Puerto Rico's power grid and that it would take anywhere between 6 months to a year to restore power, Yolanda considered the mental effects of darkness:[100]

> All I kept thinking of was light. Light or lack of. It affects your mood and it's only a matter of time before depression sets in because you rise to the occasion when there's an emergency but your sense of staying at that level of function only lasts for so long. And we didn't know how long…So solar seemed to catch my attention. So *Adopta un Pueblo* was initially about focusing on one area at a time, not focusing on the whole island because you could go with a truckload of stuff but that's not going to do much for the whole island. But if you focus on one specific town or community, they're strong and they can help the guys next door.

When her friend Monica, a local entrepreneur who provided "cultural competency" trainings for companies and organizations in the area, returned home from a business trip, Yolanda shared her idea for providing solar-powered lightbulbs and lanterns one municipality at a time. Monica immediately jumped on board and the two decided to pilot the program in Monica's hometown of Ciales.

What was perhaps most integral to the success of the project was the building and strengthening of social networks both on the archipelago and in the United States. For instance, Monica was also able to get in touch with an old friend who was now a pastor in Ciales and had a network of over a hundred churches at her disposal to serve as potential distribution sites. Monica's sister joined the project and was also able to connect with a teacher in Ciales, who agreed to do an on the ground assessment of the needs of her community.

[100] We know now that it did take nearly a year to restore power to the majority of Puerto Rico's residents.

"You always go back to your roots," Monica said, as she described the network-based activism that helped *Adopta un Pueblo* come to fruition.

These networks also extended across the diaspora with the help of social media. Monica explained:

> Here on the mainland, it's making connections using Facebook with people that are from Ciales . . . even though we don't know each other. It's been crazy. We've made such a great friendship with this woman that lives in Austin and she's been collecting all of this stuff and she messengers us, it's like a group of 35 people, "Hi, here are pictures of all the stuff I have, I just don't have money to ship it" through el *correo* (the mailbox) to the P.O. Box to the pastor…And so she opens up a PayPal account and we just put money, everybody chips in, and she receives it and then she sends pictures of the receipts from the post office. It's been nothing short of like a trust network. The foundation of the whole freaking thing has been trust - trusting in your fellow Latinos. And that's why we call it "*los hijos auscentes, dicen presente*" (absent children, say present) because even though we're not *en la Isla* (on the island) and we don't live in the same town, it's like we have Ciales here in the U.S.

As Monica indicates, a majority of the group's communication and recruitment were conducted through Facebook Messenger or the group's Facebook page, where calls for supplies and instructions on how to "adopt" a town were posted. There, they also shared videos of volunteers making the trip to Puerto Rico to distribute lightbulbs. These virtual spaces play an important role in the circulation of information, ideas, and narratives, bearing implications for both collective action and the fostering of national identities (Castells 1996; Wilson and Peterson 2002).

The establishment of these "trust networks" also reveals something about the contours of Puerto Rican nationalism and citizenship. In his influential work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that the nation is an "imagined political community" in which "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (49). The idea of an imagined community is manifest in the interactions Monica describes above with

the woman in Austin and with other volunteers in Puerto Rico, as well as across the diaspora – many of whom have not met but all share a common attachment to the archipelago.

The organization's slogan, "*los hijos auscentes dicen presente*" (the absent children say present) is a form of "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson 1998) that is at once a driving force of their grassroots activism and a claim of belonging. Both Yolanda and Monica were born in New York, although Monica spent the majority of her childhood living in Puerto Rico before migrating to the United States as a young adult. Despite their absence from Puerto Rico and the marginalization of diaspora-born Puerto Ricans in Orlando (Sánchez 2009; Silver 2015), Yolanda and Monica claim their place within a larger Puerto Rican community by drawing on the discourse of kinship. Nowhere is this clearer than in the reference to the return of "absent children" or in the act of "adopting" a town.

In anthropology, kinship was traditionally a central component of the study of the organization of a given society based on biological relationships (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001; Evans-Pritchard 1951; Morgan 1871). But other scholars have contested and expanded classic notions of kinship to extend beyond blood and include other modes of belonging (Collier et. al. 1982; Rodriguez 2009; Schneider 1972). The allusion to fictive kin, in the case of *Adopta un Pueblo*, is symbolic of ethnic, familial, moral, and other bonds that adhere individuals to Puerto Rico and each other. On the one level, "*Adopta un Pueblo*" represents that "more focused response" that Yolanda hoped to achieve but, on the other, it reveals how Puerto Ricans in diaspora are "related" or may configure their own notions of belonging - like the act of trying to create "Ciales here in the U.S."[101]

[101] On November 16, 2017, the women held a fundraiser at a local pub and collected over $3500 to invest in solar lightbulbs. The event was attended by Latinx and non-Latinxs alike, many outside of the "usual suspects," as Yolanda likes to call them. Various members have also made

Figure 26: *Adopta un Pueblo* logo. Mirrored after the iconic 1945 photograph of the American Flag being raised in Iwo Jima, the logo, according to Monica represents "strong Puerto Rican families comprised of men, women and children lift up the flag as a sign of taking the restoration of our island from devastation into our own hands." Photo by *Adopta un Pueblo*, 2017.

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several trips to the Puerto Rico to distribute lightbulbs and other goods to towns they have "adopted." By December 2017, Monica had filed the paperwork to have the organization become a 501C3, with the hopes of creating an umbrella organization with the mission to "aid individuals, families and communities impacted by adversity and hardship due to natural disasters, personal loss or discrimination by amplifying philanthropic collaborative initiatives that bring positive social change."

El Pueblo Puertorriqueño / The Puerto Rican People
Hoy se encuentra lastimado / Find themselves hurt today
Pues Maria lo ha dejado / Because Maria has left them
Triste, y poco risueño / Sad and with little joy
Pero el Pueblo con empeño / But the people with determination
Fuerte se va a levantar / Will rise up with strength
Y al mundo va a demonstrar / And will demonstrate to the world
Con su tenaz valentía / With their tenacious courage
Que le ganara a Maria / That they will beat Maria
Con la ayuda federal / With federal help

Muchos llegan hasta Orlando / Many arrive in Orlando
Donde no canta el coqui / Where the coqui does not sing
Y no hay moriviví / And there is no moriviví
De Kissimmee hasta Sanford / From Kissimmee to Sanford
Ellos vienen demandando / They come demanding
Un reclamo de igualdad / A claim to equality
Y vienen a develar / And they come to reveal
De luto, hoy mi bandera / My flag today in mourning
Pa'que la Florida entera / So that all of Florida
Se una en solidaridad / Will unite in solidarity

Quizás faltan los colores / Perhaps the colors are missing
Hoy, de la mono-estrellada / Today, from the mono-star
Pero no hay voz callada / But there is no quiet voice
Superando los dolores / Overcoming the pain
Pues pueden más los amores / Because greater is the love
Que llegan desde San Juan, / That comes from San Juan,
Lajas, Ponce, San German / Lajas, Ponce, San German
Gritando un "Ay Bendito" / Yelling an "Oh my God"
Porque a nuestro Puerto Rico / Because our Puerto Rico
Juntos van a levantar / Together we will rise

- "*Décimas para Puerto Rico*," a *plena* written by Eric M. Jiménez

It was a particularly windy Sunday morning at Lake Eola Park in downtown Orlando. On the sidewalk, a group of fifteen representatives from Power 4 Puerto Rico had gathered for a press conference to demand action from the federal government. Among their demands were that Congress waive FEMA's cost-sharing requirements and that the disbursement of funding not depend on the votes and management of the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board. These declarations were made in light of a nearly $90 billion proposed disaster relief bill in Congress for victims of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, and the 2017 California wildfires. The bill would provide block grants to rebuild housing and infrastructure, as well as funds to help restore the archipelago's power grid.[102]

Joggers and pedestrians turned to look, but they did not stop. I wondered who else was listening, aside from the small group of reporters that were there to document the event. One by one, speakers approached the microphone to demand accountability from the federal government and declare that "we are not second-class citizens." But in that moment, I was not so much focused on their words, but on the elements of visual culture that enveloped me. Several members of the group held posters bearing the black and white images of Puerto Rican women after the storm. Behind them towered a printed-to-scale canvas rendering of "*La Puerta de La Bandera*" (The Door of the Flag), a famous mural in San Juan, Puerto Rico which is now painted black and white. To their left stood a group of *pleneros* with their guitars and drums waiting for the cue to begin their song.

Throughout my time in the field, activists would often speak against the visual backdrop of such objects or accompanied by the cadences and rhythms of music at protests, political events, as well as press conferences such as this one. Looking back at my fieldwork photographs,

[102] The bill was eventually signed into law in February 2018.

I realized that there was another dimension of citizenship at play – one that recognized how "aesthetic processes…are an essential component of the formation and understanding of cultural citizenship" (R. Flores 1997, 147). In this way, aesthetic objects also contribute to an understanding of belonging and resistance. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I consider some of these forms of cultural production as political art objects, operating on the premise that "doing art means displacing art's borders, just as doing politics means displacing the borders of what is acknowledged as *the* political" (Rancière 2010, 149).

The "Absence of Light"

After Maria, the lack of light became a central preoccupation for activists, media, and those living through the effects of the hurricane in Puerto Rico. Both English and Spanish news outlets issued multiple reports describing Puerto Rico as "left in the dark" (Glanz and Robles 2018) or "plunged into darkness" (Florido 2018). Discursively, darkness implies a literal or figurative absence of light. In both the secular and religious imaginary, the trope of darkness symbolizes wickedness or evil. Darkness evokes the fall of night, a void, or a cloak of relative obscurity – a darkness that may also be embodied by the absence of life, given the rising death toll on the archipelago. Theoretically, "darkness" has become a descriptive marker for the conceptual shift in anthropology towards a concern with power and inequality. Sherry Ortner (2016) describes a shift towards a "dark anthropology" as an "anthropology that emphasizes the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them" (49). She argues that neoliberalism, which I have discussed throughout this chapter, lies at the forefront of "dark anthropology" as both a conceptual framework and an

object of study (Ortner 2016, 51). What, then, does it mean to use the absence of light as a political aesthetic that traverses the borders from Puerto Rico to Central Florida?

***

Teresa (see Chapter 3) ended the press conference by saying: "Music is the universal language that brings people together, no matter what side, what party, what nation." With those words, she turned to the *pleneros* who promptly began a *plena* aptly titled, "*Décimas para Puerto Rico*." *Plena* is a form of popular music which originated in Ponce. It rose to popularity with the Puerto Rican working class, addressing themes such as workers' strikes, experiences of poverty, and migration (J. Flores 1993). The genre is sometimes referred to as "*el periodico cantado*" (the sung newspaper) because of its satirical recounting of current and historical events. *Plena* is characterized by its Afro-Caribbean influences and its "boisterous syncopated rhythms, improved instrumentation and vigorous call-and-response vocal cadences" (J. Flores 1993, 89). As scholars have shown across a diverse range of musical genres, such as bomba (Flores 2000), blues (Woods 1998), and reggaeton (Rivera-Rideau 2015), music not only acts as a vehicle for the cultural expression of identity and diasporic cultures, but may also serve as counter-discourse and political critique.

The *plena*, which ended the press conference and is featured on page 143, is expressly political in its demands for "*la ayuda federal*" (federal aid) equality, and solidarity among all Floridians. While a call to action, the song also captures the emotive experiences of displacement (Aranda 2006). For instance, the second verse deals directly with the experience of migration to Central Florida. The coqui, or Puerto Rican tree frog, which sings its name ("ko-kee") is an iconic symbol of Puerto Ricanness. The silencing of the coqui then, as indicated by the lines,

"*Muchos llegan hasta Orlando/ Donde no canta el coqui*" (Many arrive in Orlando/ Where the coqui does not sing) at once evokes feelings of sadness and nostalgia. There is also grief to be found in the Puerto Rican flag stripped of its colors – "*de luto*" (in mourning) – and hope that "Puerto Rico/ *Juntos van a levantar*" (Together we will rise). The latter lyrics yet another reflection of the post-disaster discourse of resilience.

As the *pleneros* finished their song, my eyes migrated to the foreground to "*La Puerta de La Bandera*" (The Door of the Flag). As soon as the press conference ended, I found Yolanda, who had photographed the image. The door, she reminded me, was painted by a Puerto Rican woman named Rosenda Álvarez Faro. In January 2012, Álvarez Faro, along with group of art students, painted the mural on the facade of an abandoned building on Calle San Jose in Old San Juan. The door is a well-known tourist landmark. After PROMESA was signed into law on June 30, 2016, a group of women artists, calling themselves "*Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia*" (Artists in Solidarity and Resistance), repainted the door black and white. Some speculated that the makeover represented mourning, but the artists themselves set the record straight in an open letter published in the online magazine *80grados*:

> The flag is black; Puerto Rico is standing up to fight . . . we decided to repaint the door the night of Monday, July 4th, 2016, knowing that the door would provoke discussions about the current economic, political and social crisis that the Island is facing . . .
>
> Art as a vehicle of expression has been used throughout history to transmit ideas, to provoke reflection, to transform and to (re)create realities. Patriotic symbols help reinforce our identity and values. Since its beginning, the Puerto Rican flag has been a symbol of resistance upon the colonial condition that the Island has faced, and for many years it was considered a crime to raise it. Later, under the colonial law of 1952 (ELA), the flag was officially adopted … To replace these colors with black (the absence of light) creates new readings. Ours is a proposal of RESISTANCE . . . May this act serve as an invitation to reflect and to take action upon the collapse of the educational and health systems, the privatization and destruction of our natural resources, our colonial status, the outrage against our future workforce, the payment of an illegitimate debt, the imposition of a non-democratic government, the strangulation of cultural efforts among other things. (*Artistas solidarios y en Resistencia* 2016)

As the artists point out in their letter, the flag has historically served as a symbol of resistance. In 1948, Law 53, known as the Gag Law, made it illegal to encourage the island's independence, making it a crime to own or display a Puerto Rican flag. While the law was repealed nine years later, the flag remains an important nationalist and anti-colonial symbol. Throughout my fieldwork, the Puerto Rican flag was featured prominently at protests, press conferences, and other events throughout the community. Like the steel flags that line Division Street in Chicago's Humboldt Park, the flag is not only instrumental in the performance of nationalism, but also in the marking of public space (Ramos-Zayas 2003).

Sherry Ortner's (1973) description of summarizing and elaborating symbols provides further insight on the symbolic power of the flag. Summarizing symbols are "objects of attention and cultural respect; they synthesize, or 'collapse,' complex experience and relate the respondent to the grounds of the system as a whole," while elaborating symbols are "valued for their contribution to the ordering or 'sorting out' of experience" (Ortner 1973, 1344). The Puerto Rican flag as a summarizing symbol may evoke feelings of pride, patriotism, hope, and even grief. But as an elaborating symbol, the Puerto Rican flag in the "absence of light" is deployed as a powerful metaphor for understanding current and longstanding social and political conditions in Puerto Rico.

But what does it mean to bring the door to Orlando? In what ways does this act reinforce the idea that "art objects are … live social beings whose aesthetic value, significance, and emotional efficacy are subject to change in the course of their mobility through time and space" (Maihoub 2015, 1)? During our conversation, Yolanda went on to explain her motivations for reproducing the image and what it meant to her.

Figure 27: Original "*Puerta-Bandera*" in San Juan. Photo by Angel Xavier Viera-Vargas. Shared under a CreativeCommons (BY-ND).

Figure 28: Large scale reproduction of *la Puerta de la Bandera* in Orlando at 2017 Women's March at Lake Eola Park. Photo by author, 2017.

*"*Recreating it here, it's such an iconic figure," she said. "I thought it would draw attention. But once it was here, it has to take on a meaning for here. To me, the door, as broken and torn up that we all know it is, it's the door to opportunity, the door to education, it's the door to housing. That's what I want the door to mean here."

On one level, Yolanda's statement and her reference to "the door to opportunity" conjure images of travel and access that mirror the "golden door" of Ellis Island. But I was at once reminded of another key symbol - that of the bridge advanced by Latinx feminist scholars, such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983), and Ruth Behar (1995). The bridge, too, evokes travel between two or more worlds – an in-betweeness that captures something of the messiness of identity and diasporic experiences. As Anzaldúa (2002) writes in the preface to *This Bridge We Call Home*, "Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives" (1).

What I am now calling *La Puerta de Orlando* (The Door of Orlando) acts similarly as a passageway between Puerto Rico and Central Florida – a portal not only for bodies, but for culture, ideas, memories, and cause. This analysis, however, does not take into account narratives of immobility. After all, doors may also be shut. For instance, recent migrants to Orlando after Hurricane Maria have described having "doors closed" on them, when it came to housing or employment opportunities. During a protest in front of the closed PRFAA office in Kissimmee, one Puerto Rican man who moved after losing his job at a casino following Hurricane Maria, described his difficulties finding housing for him and his wife, who remained back in Puerto Rico. He addressed the crowd of protestors and reporters, saying:

> *Lamentablemente siendo ciudadano Americano se nos vende un sueno Americano, pero se ha convertido en una pesadilla americana. Venir a los Estados Unidos a tratar de uno poder superarse y tener una vida decente. Lamentablemente se nos trancan las puertas en cuanto a los apartamentos, se nos ponen trabas.*
>
> Unfortunately, being an American citizen, we are sold an American dream, but it has become an American nightmare. One comes to the United States to try to overcome and have a decent life. Unfortunately, they close the doors on us in regards to apartments, they put obstacles in our way.

Narratives such as these add another element of complexity to the metaphor, illustrating not only the paradoxes of art, but also the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans whom, although American citizens at birth must oftentimes contend with what Lugo (2008) calls the "border inspections" of everyday life. If we return to Yolanda's words, her insistence that the door "has to take on a meaning for here," signals a transformation – a remodeling, if you will, that takes into account the experiences of Puerto Ricans now living in Orlando. In this way, the act of bringing the door to Orlando is a highly symbolic gesture – one that has the ability to not only shift consciousness, but may also serve as a tool for understanding forms of belonging or dis-belonging and resistance.

Women of the Storm

During the Power 4 Puerto Rico press conference, I also noticed that several individuals held posters, in full view of the cameras. It was not the first time I had seen these posters. They made their debut at first anniversary of the Women's March just a day prior. Each poster bore the black and white image of a Puerto Rican woman, mediated by a few short lines of text. In the first poster (Figure 29), a woman sits on a couch, her face concealed by her hand. Behind her, a

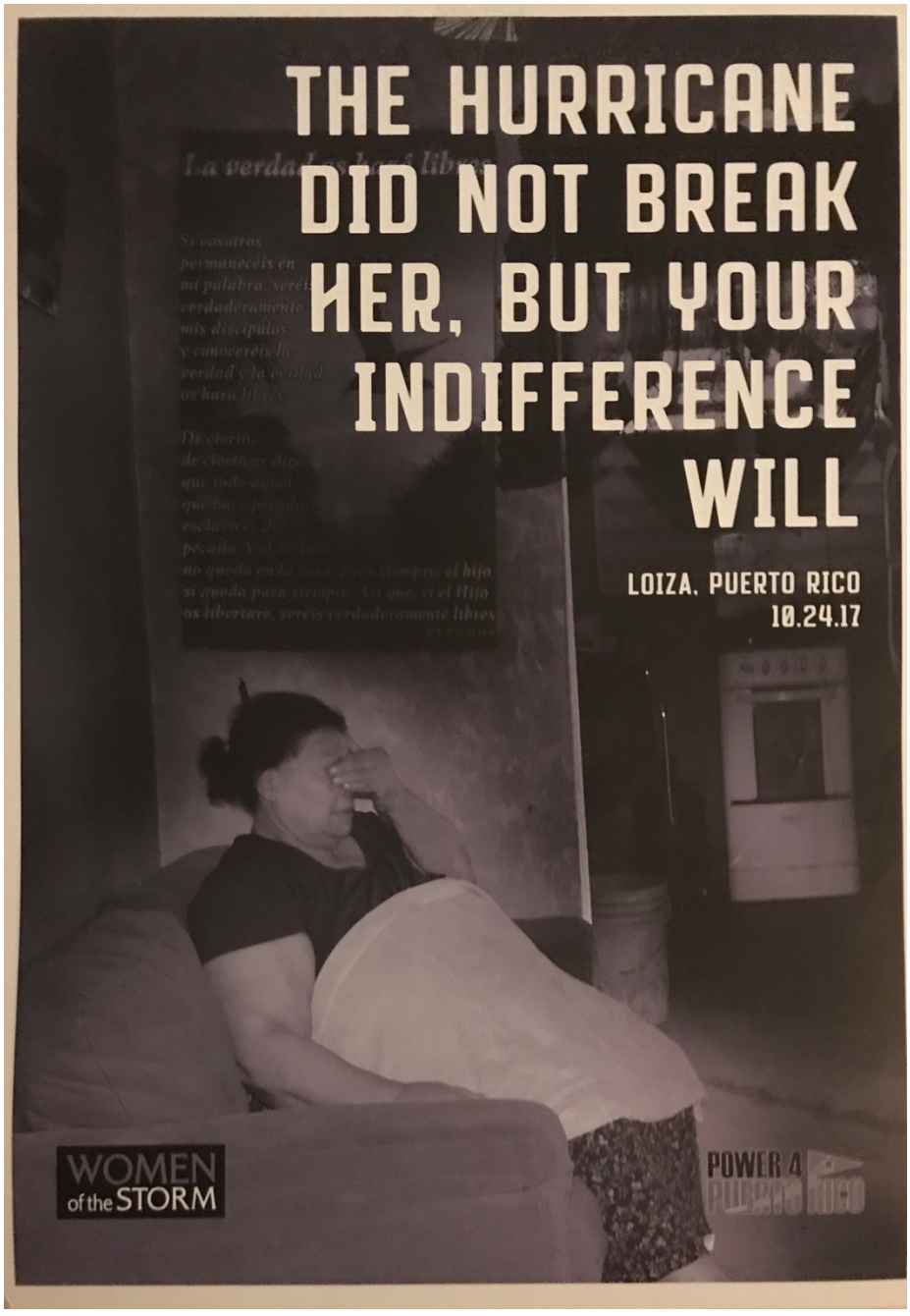
THE HURRICANE DID NOT BREAK HER, BUT YOUR INDIFFERENCE WILL
LOIZA, PUERTO RICO
10.24.17
WOMEN of the STORM
POWER 4 PUERTO RICO

Figure 29


PUERTO RICO
2017
PUERTO RICO
1940
NEARLY 80 YEARS LATER
NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED
WE CANNOT LET PUERTO
RICO BE KEPT THERE
WOMEN
of the STORM
POWER 4
PUERTO RICO

Figure 30

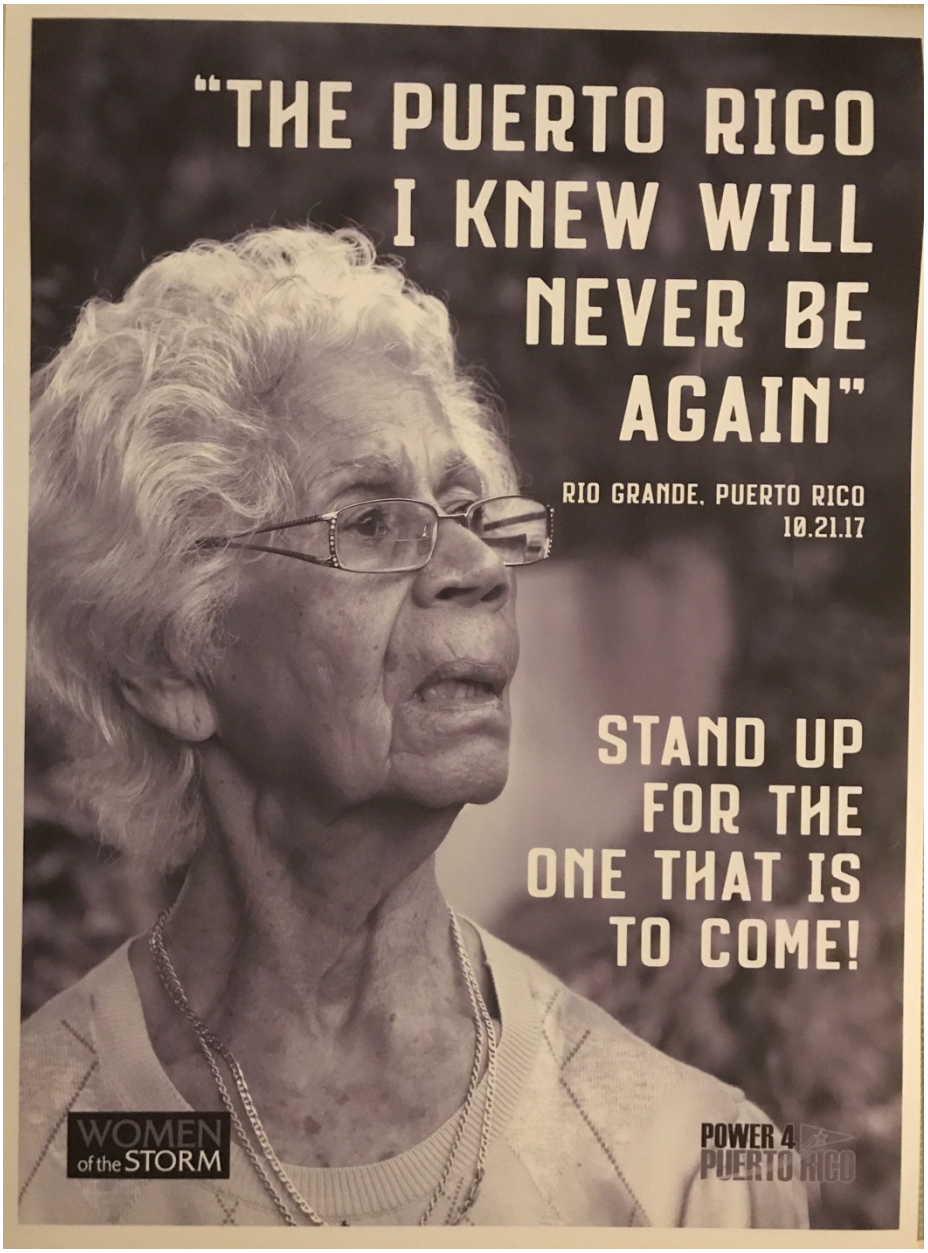
"THE PUERTO RICO I KNEW WILL NEVER BE AGAIN"
RIO GRANDE, PUERTO RICO
10.21.17
STAND UP FOR THE ONE THAT IS TO COME!
WOMEN of the STORM
POWER 4 PUERTO RICO

Figure 31

poster is visible on the wall with a Bible verse from John 8:31-38: "*La verdad os hará libres*" (The truth will set you free). At the fore of the image, in large block capital letters, is the accompanying text: "The hurricane did not break her, but your indifference will." In the second poster (Figure 30), we see a family crowded in a doorway in the present day. The image is juxtaposed with a photograph taken by Ukrainian-born, American photographer, filmmaker, and composer Jack Delano in the 1940s. The poster reads: "Nearly 80 years later not much has changed. We cannot let Puerto Rico be kept there." Lastly, the third poster (Figure 31) is a portrait of an older woman staring off to the side. It reads: "'The Puerto Rico I knew will never be again.' Stand up for the one that is to come."

Taken together, the posters attempt to mobilize viewers and convince politicians at the local and federal level to take action on behalf of Puerto Rico following the devastation of Hurricane Maria. But they also exhibit something of the dimensions of temporality. As Munn (1992) discusses in her review essay, "The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay," traditional anthropological analyses of time have tended to "compartmentalize" or divide time into "'categories' that derive from and reflect the groupings and varied 'rhythms' of social life" (95). The posters seen here construct a picture of the present, past, and uncertain future of the archipelago. But this conceptualization of time is far from linear. For instance, the last two posters (figures 30 and 31) appear to be in contrast with one another. While one laments that not much has changed, the other mourns for a Puerto Rico lost while looking into the future. In this case, the past encroaches onto the present, and the present embarks onto the future.

"It's like seeing people naked," Yolanda, who took the photographs for the posters on a previous visit to Puerto Rico, explained. "It reminded me of the humiliation of the Jews with the Germans, when they finally came to the camps to liberate them. Like the nakedness, the

condition. That's what it reminded me of. Something so raw. I think a lot of it was really minimized here. And they weren't seeing themselves because they had no electricity, so they weren't seeing the pain of their fellow whatever. *Me dio pena* (I felt sorry for them). So taking their pictures was not easy but I had promised someone if you give me a press pass, I'll give you the images. So I took the pictures. I did the best I could with them."

"Some of them were very poignant," she continued, recalling the images on the posters. "There's one of a woman in her doorway. Her children are around her … I can show you pictures in the 30s and the 40s that Jack Delano took and it's the same picture, except we are now in 2017. *Que* (What)? And the picture is the same picture. That contrast to me is painful. That this many years later *estamos viviendo lo mismo* (we are living through the same thing)."

While the medium of photography itself has inspired other discussions of temporality (Barthes 1980; Derrida 1993), Yolanda's insistence that "*estamos viviendo lo mismo*," also points to the intertwinement of the past-present-future relation (Munn 1992). However, her characterization of the "nakedness" and rawness of the human condition brings to mind criticisms regarding the over-reliance of humanitarian aid organizations and others on the discourses and visual representation of the "suffering subject" in the aftermath of trauma or crisis (Allen 2009; Fassin 2008; Feldman 2004). But as Butler (2005) has argued, mediums such as photography "can and must represent human suffering, teach us how to feel across global distances, establish through the visual frame a proximity to suffering that keeps us alert to the human cost of war, famine, and destruction in places that may be far from us geographically and culturally" (824), exposing the vulnerability and fragility of human life. Yolanda's photographs not only captured this vulnerability but also call attention to the gendered dimensions of disaster and relief. She came up with the idea to call the series of posters, "Women of the Storm."

Interestingly enough, in New Orleans there was also group of activist women who referred to themselves as "Women of the Storm." David (2017) describes how this group of elite white women came together post hurricanes Katrina and Rita to lobby Congress to invest the resources needed to rebuild the city. [103]

"What was your inspiration for the name 'Women of the Storm,'" I asked Yolanda during our brief chat after the press conference.

"It was just something that occurred to me because the pictures that I took that were most poignant during my visit to Puerto Rico were of women," she explained. "And so, they became in my head the women of the storm…They are survivors of the storm. They are, in many senses, a lot of the women…a lot of the people I saw helping out in Puerto Rico were women that had come from here and had met up with women over there who for one reason or another were able to move around communities and give out help. Yeah, there were a lot of people from FEMA, men who were doing the heavy lifting. We get that. But in terms of giving out aid, bringing food and bringing other things like clothing and so on, were mostly women. So that's where the women of the storm came from."

Social vulnerability scholarship has shown that women are disproportionality affected by disaster**,** especially in developing countries where women experience a higher mortality rate than men (Alston, 2009; Dasgupta et. al. 2010; Enarson and Meyreles 2004; Fothergill 1996; Phillips and Morrow 2008). Yet disaster sociologist Elaine Enarson (2012) maintains that "a conspicuous silence around gender has been maintained—a looking away, perhaps a calculated blindness" around the experiences of women before, during, and following disaster (2). If, as Enarson (2012) claims, "reducing the risk of disaster is a feminist project," then we must also take into

[103] Yolanda was unaware of this group's existence. When I asked her if there was any connection, she contemplated having to change the name.

account the ways that gender, race, class, and other intersecting identities shape disaster vulnerability (197). Luft's (2016) framework of "racialized disaster patriarchy" does just that. The idea refers to the "political, institutional, organizational, and cultural practices that converge before, during, and after disaster to produce intersectional gender injustice" (Luft 2016, 3). Examples of disaster patriarchy can be seen in the case of Katrina, where the demolition of public housing disproportionately affected low-income Black women (Luft 2016), or in the rise in violence against women following Katrina, the Exxon Valdez spill, and other disasters (Enarson 2012; Jenkins and Phillips 2008). Some scholars have critiqued the silencing of Black women's suffering in the popular media, as well as the disposability of Black women's bodies post-Katrina (Winters 2011; Simmons 2011). Meanwhile, in popular culture, portrayals of mainstream recovery efforts tend to valorize the physical labor of men, while depicting women as passive victims of disaster (David and Enarson 2012; Enarson 2012), contributing to what Luft (2008) calls the "pervasive culture of masculinity."

Immediately following Maria, Puerto Rican women were noticeably absent from mainstream popular media coverage, with the exception of a few articles that highlighted women's hurricane relief efforts or experiences of migration.[104] This is evidence that the unpaid labor of women post-disaster, including the grassroots recovery efforts and emotional labor, often go unnoticed. But Yolanda's reflection does not render women as passive victims. Rather, she positions Puerto Rican women as survivors – as active agents who play an integral role in rebuilding their communities. In this way, the posters serve to reinsert Puerto Rican women into the narrative of relief.

[104] San Juan's mayor, Carmen Yulín Cruz, however, entered the public eye after Maria, particularly, for her outspoken critique of U.S. government officials and her appeals for aid on behalf of Puerto Rico.

Conclusion: How to Heal an Open Wound?

Figure 32: Paper bag luminaries at the vigil for the victims of Hurricane Maria across from the Meyer Amphitheater. Photo by author, 2018.

It was the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria. Approximately 800 people gathered on the lawn of Meyer Amphitheater in West Palm Beach, near Mar-A-Lago, for a rally and vigil for Puerto Rico. According to the event's Facebook page, the goal was to mobilize "the Puerto Rican community and allies to Mar-A-Lago, aka President Trump's 'Weekend Get Away White House' to send a clear message – Puerto Rico will not be forgotten." By the time I arrived, a sea of lawn chairs, Puerto Rican flags, and signs were spread across the great lawn. The lineup included speakers from various local and translocal organizations, as well as politicians, such as Darren Soto, Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum, and Florida State Senator Bill Nelson. To the

Figure 33: Baby Trump balloon at the Meyer Amphitheater. Its tour was organized by the People's Motorcade, an anti-Trump group in New Jersey. Photo by author, 2018.

left of the amphitheater stage, towered baby Trump, one of six giant balloons touring the United States.

By the time we moved closer to the lake for the vigil, most of the crowd had already dispersed. Paper bags adorned with black flags lined the perimeter of the lake, representing the lives of those lost. I saw Cecilia standing off to the side, alone under a tree. I hesitated as I approached her, not wanting to intrude on a private moment. She began to speak when she saw me, saying something about the constant pain - a "wound that never has the chance to heal." I was reminded of Anzaldua's (1987) characterization of the U.S.-Mexican border as "*una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds" (3). As a group of *pleneros* began their song and people began to make their way towards the charter buses that would soon take them home, I thought: Is this what an open wound feels like? Even now, as I write these pages, I think of my own family on the archipelago and across the diaspora, confronted with the question of what to do when anthropology, as Ruth Behar (1996) notes, "breaks your heart."

As Deborah Thomas (2017) notes, disasters "pose a variety of challenges for anthropologists. These challenges are both conceptual (having to do with how we parse notions of temporality and scale, cause and effect) and political (having to do with the ways in which and

venues through which we witness these events and their afterlives)" (585). This chapter, in many ways, has been about the afterlives of Hurricane Maria – afterlives which tell of the worth of human life and the many "layers" (Yuval-Davis 1999) of citizenship that are defined and redefined as Puerto Ricans struggle against inequality (Oboler 2006). As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter through a discussion of relief efforts and aesthetic practice, activism becomes a way for Puerto Rican activists in Orlando to demand and claim belonging both in relation to the U.S. nation state and to a transnational Puerto Rican community. These assertions

Figure 34: Sign on the lawn of the Meyer Amphitheater. "We are not only an island, we are 8.4 million Puerto Ricans around the world." Photo by author, 2018.

are at times reflective of neoliberal models of citizenship and deservingness and, at others, indicative of a deliberate inclusion that contests racialized and gendered notions of citizenship. While cultural citizenship is oftentimes framed within the borders of the nation-state, the approach to citizenship in this chapter pushes notions of belonging beyond the nation-state (see Siu 2005). Puerto Ricans are ultimately located at the borderlands of citizenship, not only in the juridical sense, but also in the ways that modes of belonging span across multiple spaces.

In closing, let us reconsider Agamben's insistence that "today, 'crisis' means, "you must obey!" The more I reflect on my fieldwork in Orlando and these emerging forms of activism and cultural production, the more I realize that this is simply not the case. Perhaps, "crisis" means you must disobey. Perhaps, this is how we begin to heal.

EPILOGUE

A HOT SUMMER'S DAY

Y que cante;
y que grite;
y que se interne en todos los rincones anónimos
despertando rebeldías;
y que barra la cara de los eternos jorobados del tiempo
enfermos de no pensar;
y que cuelgue todas las canciones de rumbos y burgueses,
y rompa sus segundos en un millón de himnos proletarios.

And let it sing;
and let it scream;
and let it penetrate in all the anonymous corners
awakening rebellions;
and let it sweep the face of the eternal hunchbacks of time
sick of not thinking;
and let it hang all the song of bourgeois ways
and break its seconds in a million proletarian hymns.

- "*Amaneceres*" (Dawnings) by Julia de Burgos,
in *Song of the Simple Truth, The Complete Poems of Julia de Burgos*

On July 24, 2019, I watched with anticipation from my living room in Orlando as Puerto Rico's governor, Ricardo Rosselló, announced his resignation in a pre-filmed video that lasted approximately fourteen minutes.[105] This came after nearly 900-pages of Telegram app chat messages between Rosselló and eleven other government officials containing misogynistic, homophobic, violent, and derogatory comments, were leaked to the public by Puerto Rico's

[105] His resignation was effective August 2, 2019.

Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (Center for Investigative Journalism).[106] Among the messages were "jokes" that made light of the bodies of Puerto Ricans in the morgue after Hurricane Maria, as well as references to New York City Council speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito as a "whore" and San Juan mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz as a "daughter of a bitch."[107] The scandal, which became known as "Rickyleaks," sparked nearly two weeks of intense protest in Puerto Rico, as half a million Puerto Ricans from across the archipelago gathered to call for Rosselló's resignation. The protests brought together people from all walks of life – young, old, Black, white, LGBTQ, straight. Captured under the hashtag #RICKYRENUNCIA, protesters marched throughout the narrow streets of Old San Juan. While some faced tear gas and rubber bullets launched at them by riot police, others danced the "*perreo combative*" (combative reggaeton dance) in front of *La Fortaleza* (governor's mansion).[108]

In the co-edited online forum, "The Decolonial Geographies of Puerto Rico's 2019 Summer Protests: A Forum," scholars provide a critical analysis of the summer 2019 protests and the events leading up to them. According to Villanueva and LeBrón (2020), the authors map the spaces of "decolonial struggle," demonstrating "Puerto Ricans' refusal to accept the violence of abstract space." But the diaspora, too, is home to spaces of decolonial struggle. Across the diaspora, protests were held in solidarity - the threads tethering Puerto Ricans in the United

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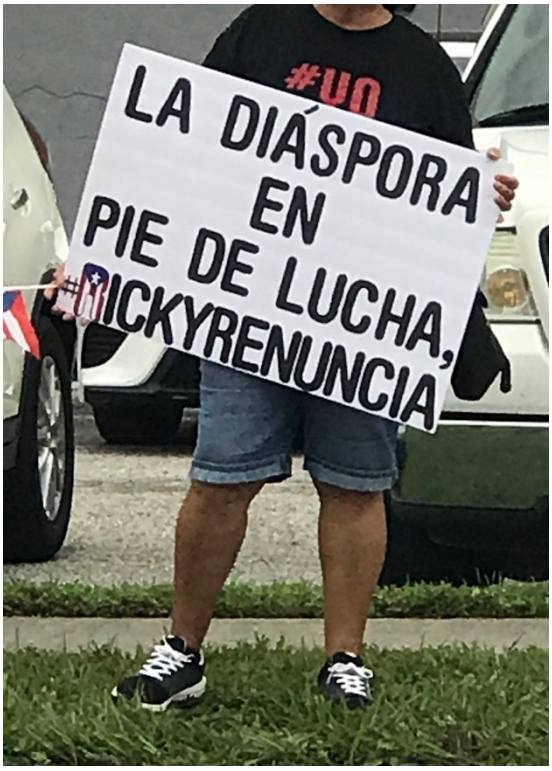
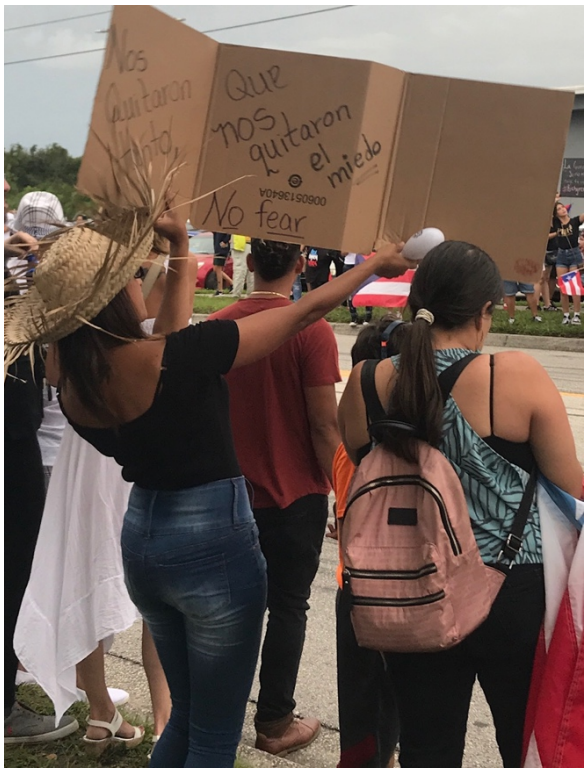
[106] On July 13, 2019, the *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo* published the full chat, which can be found at: http://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2019/07/las-889-paginas-de-telegram-entre-rossello-nevares-y-sus-allegados/. See also Bonilla (2019) and LeBrón (2019).

[107] The messages were written in Spanish. These are translations of the derogatory Spanish words used.

[108] *Perreo* is the dance style associated with reggaeton in which dance partners dance in close unison. Like *plena* and other musical forms, reggaeton became a weapon of resistance and a counternarrative to notions of "civility" during the 2019 summer protests (Abadía-Rexach 2020; Dávila and LeBrón 2019).

States to the archipelago on display for the world to see. In Central Florida, Puerto Ricans gathered outside the new PRFAA office in Orlando, on the lawn of Lake Eola Park, and on the sidewalks outside of La Terraza Sports Bar in Kissimmee to wave their flags, play their instruments, and sing patriotic hymns of liberation. Many held signs written with messages, such as, "*Nos quitaron tanto, que nos quitaron hasta el miedo*." (They have taken so much from us, they have even taken our fear). As Mónica Jiménez (2020) suggests, these words, in particular, carry the weight of not only the loss of life post-Maria, but also the loss of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans who have been displaced as a result of austerity and "unnatural" disaster.





Figures 35 and 36: Demonstrators hold signs outside La Terraza Sports Bar in Kissimmee during a protest organized by *Somos Puerto Rico* Relief Team on July 21, 2019. Photos by author, 2019.

Figure 37: Parked car on the lawn outside La Terraza Sports Bar in Kissimmee during a protest organized by *Somos Puerto Rico* Relief Team on July 21, 2019. Photo by author, 2019.

During one of these protests, I made my way through the crowd outside of La Terraza Sports Bar, I noticed a parked car with the words written in white paint: "*Ricky renuncia por los que queremos regresar*" (Ricky resign for those of us who wish to return). The protests were ultimately about much more than chat messages – they were about what I have called the "fractals of austerity" (Chapter 2), the forms of structural violence that collapse onto everyday life. As the protest cry, "*Ricky, puñeta, Puerto Rico se respeta*" (Ricky, damn it, Puerto Rico is to be respected), suggests, they were also about claims to human dignity and respect that take up space and overflow across borders.

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Throughout this dissertation, I have centered Puerto Rican women's voices, drawing on feminist genealogies, in order to demonstrate the ways that what is popularly conceived of as "crisis" can act as a mobilizing force that builds communities of dissent across spaces. Feminist anthropology has a history of engaging social movements.[109] A feminist orientation not only calls out issues of representation and exclusion through attention to intersecting oppressions, but also makes us more attuned to the ruptures, the tensions, and the heterogeneity encompassed by social justice movements (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981; Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). These moments of rupture and tension, as I have shown, reveal the messiness of activism, as well as its nascent possibilities.

I have also highlighted acts of public refusals like the one above. Puerto Rican activists in the Orlando metropolitan area are actively staking a claim to belonging, not only in Central Florida and the United States, more broadly, but also in relation to Puerto Rico. Taken together, the chapters of this dissertation have explored the consequences of when people feel unsafe – when austerity has led to forced displacement and economic and emotional insecurity (see Chapter 2), when physical and metaphorical "homes" are destroyed by violence and disaster (see Chapters 4 and 5), and when people must contend with threats to power and representation at all levels of politics (see chapter 3).

Since I concluded the fieldwork for this project, more than 900 earthquakes have rocked the archipelago, beginning on December 28, 2019. Schools collapsed, people were left without water and power, and thousands, afraid to sleep in their homes, sought out the relative security of

[109] See Lamphere (2016) for more on the historical evolution of the relationship between social movements and feminist anthropology.

camping tents. As of March 2020, Puerto Ricans are still living under those tents.[110] While it is too soon to tell if and how the earthquakes will affect migration to Central Florida, if earlier migration patterns are any indication, Florida will remain an important site for the diaspora in the years to come.

I have used events such as these as a starting point of analysis to explore the concept of "crisis" ethnographically. Beyond Puerto Rico, children are separated from their families and locked in cages; Black people continue to die at the hands of the state, as do Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and white supremacy continues to come out from behind the hood, from Charlottesville to New Zealand.[111] As I write these final pages in March 2020, the world is faced with yet another crisis, as an illness known as coronavirus (COVID-19) becomes a global pandemic. The discourse of "crisis" is all around us. It evokes fears, anxieties, anger and insecurity. It inspires policies and prescriptions that are oftentimes not in the best interest of those most vulnerable. "Crisis" is a heavy word, and yet I argue that what is needed is a new vocabulary.

In "A Letter To My Ex-Opponent, Mayor Of San Juan," Antonio Carmona Báez, a member of the Working People's Party (PPT) and former candidate for the 2016 San Juan mayoral race, writes in the closing of his published letter addressed to San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín:

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[110] See Robles and Rodriguez (2020).

[111] On August 11 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, white nationalists marched with lit torches, igniting violence throughout the city. The following day, the scheduled "Unite the Right" rally resulted in several injuries and the death of Heather Heyer, as a neo-Nazi drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters. On March 15, 2019, 49 people were killed after a white supremacist opened fire at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

> *En fin* (In closing), my highly esteemed mayor, I confess that to speak of the present without considering the near future holds no logic. This unnatural disaster, post-Maria, must be politicized. There is no turning back, nor do we want to return to the normality that has brought us to the situation in which we find ourselves - dependent upon those who have subordinated us for centuries and those who continue to disregard our lives. Please send my regards to the Sovereigntists and to all the progressive forces who are willing to take advantage of this moment to build a national project. We can no longer speak of reconstruction, we must talk about reconstitution. (Baez 2017)

If we are to speak of reconstitution, as Baez suggests, then we must also challenge the normativity of crisis. Perhaps it is not of crisis we should speak at all, but of the spaces in-between. It is there, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, that we can find the webs of power sticky with the tar of neoliberalism, of U.S. empire, and with the possibilities of activism that constitute what we call "crisis."

But what of the future? As Rayna Rapp (2016) suggests, "social movements always recast contested pasts as they stake their claims on a more just future" (1). But futurity is about much more than imagining a better future. A view of futurity from the margins has taught us about the ways that alienation and anger can lead to "revolutionary consciousness" (Ahmed 2010, 168). It is about resistance to erasure and a claim to a future that includes us. For instance, in the context of indigenous futurity, Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) ascertain that settler futurity "means the continued and complete eradication of the original inhabitants of contested land" (80).[112] In other words, the future is effectively denied to some and not others. As Muñoz (2009) contends in *Cruising Utopia,* "the future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of future" (95).[113]

[112] See also Lugo (2015), for an analysis of how empire has facilitated the erasure of indigeneity along the U.S.-Mexico border.

[113] Muñoz is writing against Edelman's (2004) rejection of "reproductive futurity."

Puerto Ricans are also struggling against eradication – to stake a claim to a future that would be denied to them in a present where austerity, violence, and disaster threaten their right to exist. In her analysis of precarity in Japan, Allison (2013) draws on the work of Povinelli (2011) to posit that "the deadening of life that occurs may also be, or inspire, a call for social revolution or, at least, a call, a demand, for a reconfiguration of the social, 'a social otherwise' (Povinelli 2011, 16). It could be an unwillingness to die, a demand to live (better), and insistence that society must change" (129). Puerto Ricans in Central Florida are actively engaged in the construction of an "otherwise" - an otherwise that cannot be separated from the socio-political context of the archipelago.

***

During one of our conversations, Yolanda was critical of those who invest in Puerto Rican issues and local politics for "secondary gains." She evoked the "spirit" of the Young Lords and the historic social movements of New York and Chicago.

"I don't think back in the day the Young Lords that there was anybody pooling that kind of money into the Young Lords to keep it going. There was a spirit that kept it alive on its own. That I think demands respect. Until we start seeing stuff like that again, we're just going to be this noisy little rabble in the corner. Then when crazy stuff happens, then we're those savages in the corner, but something will have been gained. There will be martyrs in the process. It doesn't have to be that way."

"Do you see that happening here, like the New York or Chicago movements?" I asked.

"Not right now," she replied. "We need a good hot summers day where people are bored because they can't get a job and they're sick and tired of the same run around. It could be a

police shooting, it could be somebody gets hit by a car - just a spark. We need a good hot summers day and that ain't coming anytime soon."

I was reminded of these words after the 2019 summer protests. They seem, in retrospect, almost prophetic. Perhaps, we have already seen a glimpse of that spark. Perhaps, there are other hot summer days on the horizon.

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