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¿Quién le debe a quién?:
Debt and Coloniality in Contemporary Puerto Rican Culture

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between cultural production in Puerto Rico from 2005 to the present and the unfolding debt crisis on the island. I explore the relationship between colonialism as an institution, coloniality as a broader structuring of power, and the current debt crisis by examining cultural objects that speak to the relation between debt and colonialism. I argue that popular culture is a rich site where fraught discourses on coloniality and indebtedness are constantly articulated and propose that literature and popular culture theorize on the conditions of indebtedness and coloniality in powerful and unique ways that counter dominant discourses on these phenomena. Debt will be considered as a simultaneously economic, social and moral relation that shapes not just life under the Puerto Rican crisis but social relationships broadly construed.

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One of this project's findings is that the only legitimate form of debt is to those we care for. Without exploiting the metaphor into cliché: I am in deep dept to the people who helped me get here. I am so grateful to Frances Aparicio for believing in me, for pushing me to think outside disciplinary limits, and for guiding me through this project with commitment, care, humanity, and humor. This project was born in meetings with Frances where she effortlessly wove intellectual, political, and personal ideas and showed me good work could be all three of these. I am grateful to Emily Maguire for her enthusiasm towards my work and her committed guidance. John Alba Cutler was incredibly generous and committed, I always left conversation with him with a broadened sense of the possibilities of literary form. Ramón Rivera Servera cheered on this project from the beginning and always offered insightful feedback.

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A mi madre, Zoraida Montes Figueroa, mis abuelas Rafaela Figueroa Figueroa y Ana Rosa Cordero Rodríguez, y a las generaciones de mujeres de Patillas que las antecedieron.

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Introduction

"THIS DEBT IS PAID WITH BLOOD
read this as a contextual palindrome.
but it isn't a debt. it isn't a debt. the state isn't charging.
there is no reciprocity."
-Raquel Salas Rivera, *Lo terciario/The Tertiary*

This dissertation reads through Puerto Rican literature, music, theater, and performance of the twenty-first century to try to understand why Puerto Ricans are expected to pay back a $72 billion debt to the United States. The question stems from incredulity: if the US has colonized and exploited Puerto Rico for over one century, and a colonial economic model has kept Puerto Rico under an economic recession for almost two decades, and amidst this recession the worst Hurricane in over a century destroyed the island and ran over $95 billion in damages, how is it possible that we are expected to pay anything back? Is it not criminal to impose austerity measures that threaten the very existence of Puerto Rico as a singular entity? That these questions read as naïve only reveals the power of debt to normalize the violence that lies at its core and "turn human relations into mathematics" (Graeber, *Debt* 14). The question of 'quién le debe a quién' that gives title to this dissertation is fundamental because "arguments about who really owes what to whom have played a central role in shaping our basic vocabulary of right and wrong" (8).

The epigraph above asserts the violent nature of debt and refuses to acknowledge its legitimacy. The excerpt from a poem in *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* (2018) by Puerto Rican poet Raquel Salas Rivera is an example of how literature, and culture broadly, can be a main site of theorization and knowledge production about the condition of being indebted. It can be a site of resistance. It can give language to a series of feelings the debt produces in its debtors: rage, refusal, exhaustion, and a whole range of affective responses I will explore. Poetic language

counters the endless parade of dry economic and legal analysis that frames the terms of the debt conversation. It gives the debt crisis a body. The body it produces is localized and marked by colonization, race, gender, class, and sexuality. Culture produces knowledge about what it is like to live through, and experience being indebted in ways more intimate than most other forms of discourse that represent the debt crisis on the public stage. Cultural texts shift the arena of the conversation, replacing the debtor's terms with those of the indebted.

Through the study of these texts, I hope to denaturalize the belief that Puerto Rico's debt must be paid back. This assertion is not exclusive to cultural production or academia—a lot of its main voices are activists on the ground in Puerto Rico and its diaspora, as the popular protest chant often heard on the streets 'esa deuda criminal/no la vamos a pagar'— and I hope to connect their claim with cultural representations of debt that illuminate it. To do this, I hope to show how "lessons about debt are encrypted across contemporary culture" by looking into how debt affects our ideas of personhood and moral character; how it changes our understanding of rationality and responsibility" (McClanahan 1-2).

Theories of indebtedness such as David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011) and Mauricio Lazzarato's *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2011) help me build my arguments, but I question the universality of the indebted subject and situate it in the poor, Black women and queer subjects under the austerity of Puerto Rico's debt crisis. For this, I follow the work of Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, who make a call to "mostrar el modo diferencial en que la deuda funciona para las mujeres y las lesbianas, [y] trans," in order to "quitarle su poder de abstracción" (*Una lectura feminista de la deuda* 11). Gago and Cavallero's move to "sacar del closet a la deuda" (9) not only localizes the indebted subject under the particular coordinates of coloniality, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, it also collectivizes and politicizes debt's

"ubiquitous social form," (McClanahan 2) aiming to imbue an abstract and complicated phenomenon with embodied experience. Writing from Puerto Rico, I follow feminist Ariadna Godreau Aubert's reminder that "la voz que nombra [la deuda] es experta y masculina" (*Las propias* 16) and therefore naming indebtedness as a specifically female, Black, queer, or trans reality acknowledges that "la austeridad expropia a las mujeres. Nos deja sin trabajo, vivienda, salud, educación, familia, cuerpo. Nombrar y cuestionar la deuda es insistir en la permanencia individual y colectiva de nosotras" (15). [1] Godreau Aubert declares that "nosotras […] no nos debemos a nadie" (54) as a feminist refusal of indebtedness and its exploitation, but it is important to note that debt can be "mutual" and "runs in every direction, scatters, escapes, seeks refuge" (Harney and Moten 4). This understanding of debt not as a financial apparatus of capture (Zambrana, Lazzarato) but as a promise of community and collective marronage is the only form of obligation legitimate as debt, as many of the texts I examine will show.

I examine contemporary poetry, a Broadway musical, salsa songs, and various media campaigns that (in more or less explicit ways) engage debt from a broad spectrum of political positions. These works run the gamut of reactions toward the debt: from the internalized belief that the debt must be repaid to the refusal of indebtedness and thus coloniality rooted in marronage. The breadth of cultural works responds to Nestor Garcia Canclini's belief that "no funciona la oposición abrupta entre […]lo culto, lo popular y lo masivo," (*Culturas híbridas* 14) as late capitalist structures seep into virtually all cultural forms. Even when literary and mass cultural products follow different routes of production, distribution, and consumption, they are in conversation with each other, as evidenced in the fact that poet Raquel Salas Rivera wrote the

[1] Though Godreau-Aubert's statement refers to women, I argue that this category can be broadened to account for queer cis and transgender subjects, and the ways these identities intersect with race and class.

poem "Hamilton" on occasion of the play's arrival in Puerto Rico.[2] My analysis also shows that resistance or the practice of liberation is not the privileged arena of literature and is in fact widely supported in mass public discourse.

Understanding the Crisis

I use the word crisis to refer to the economic recession that began in 2005 after the phasing out of Section 936, a law that offered tax incentives to US pharmaceutical companies. Most packed up, leaving high unemployment and the beginning of an economic recession that is still ongoing almost twenty years later.[3] From the end of Section 936 in 1996, to the start of an official government recession in 2005, to Law 7 and its destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, the crisis manifested as what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence,' which differs from our traditional understanding of violence as "a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" (3). Crisis implies a heightened moment of upheaval, but in Puerto Rico it has become a permanent fixture of everyday life. A longer view of crisis would look back to sustained capitalist crisis since 1974 (Muñiz Varela). Muñiz Varela also reminds us that "capital *es* crisis" (213), echoing the Marxist claim that the condition of capitalism is itself the crisis. In *Zombies, Migrants, and Queers: Race and Crisis Capitalism in Pop Culture* (2017), Camila Fojas also reminds us that "crisis is a permanent condition of capitalism" (6), a phenomenon that is presented by hegemonic economic powers as cyclical and inevitable, and is therefore normalized. What does 'crisis' mean in the context of centuries of colonial precarity and racial capitalism? There is an undeniable impoverishment of material conditions in Puerto

[2] The poem was originally published as a post on Facebook and then appeared in the literary magazine *The Equalizer*, in 2018.
[3] The impact of the phased incentives must be understood under the broader context of 1990s neoliberalism and globalization, especially the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and a newfound economic subalterity for Mexico, Latin America, and Puerto Rico.

Rico during the last two decades, but there are also colonial structures that make scarcity a timeless condition of the colony.

The lack of economic growth and development that followed the recession reveals the colonial dependency economic model of Puerto Rico, which is in turn one of the root causes for the debt. As such, Puerto Rico's current economic moment exemplifies a combination of coloniality and neoliberalism that is globally relevant. David Harvey shows how market de-regulation and the dismantling of the Welfare State are a conscious effort to transform the global economy through public policies of which Puerto Rico has not been extent. The historical moment of late capitalism and debt economies have created a seemingly permanent state of economic crises that ripple around the globe—think Greece, Argentina, Spain, Ecuador, and many others. This aids the normalization of crisis that is reproduced globally and endlessly, though the colonial context of Puerto Rico does offer important particularities.

On June 30, 2016, US Congress passed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, abbreviated and commonly known as PROMESA. The name cynically invokes the promise to pay back the $72 billion debt Puerto Rico allegedly owed the US and seems to want to suggest the promise of a better future, even though in reality the austerity that would come foreclosed any possibilities of future. PROMESA supposedly aimed to chart a course toward the debt's repayment—exactly one year after the debt was declared unpayable by the local government (Corkery and Williams Walsh)— by imposing a board of seven members appointed by US Congress that effectively stripped Puerto Rico of all illusions of limited sovereignty it had in the past.[4] As such, the arrival of PROMESA radically changed the landscape in two main ways: first, the appointment of the Fiscal Control Board (referred to as La

[4] See Díaz Sánchez for a legal discussion on PROMESA's impact on Puerto Rican sovereignty.

Junta[5] going forward) challenged the extent of sovereignty Puerto Ricans imagined themselves to have had, laying bare a regress to a more overt form of colonialism. Second, it made clear that all government efforts to deal with the debt crisis would be put into helping debtors collect the debt, at the cost of economic development and social stability.

Yet the arrival of PROMESA and the subsequent events that have unfolded because of it have given the crisis visibility and enough material impact to assert the violence between 2016 and 2021 has stopped being slow. During this time, austerity has claimed more than fifty percent of schools on the islands, the retirement benefits stability of thousands of pensioners, and half the budget of the University of Puerto Rico.[6] In 2017, Hurricane Maria laid bare the effects of austerity on a debilitated infrastructure, as millions spent months without electricity, lacked access to food, and lost their homes. The combination of PROMESA and Hurricane Maria turned the 'slow' violence of the crisis into a spectacular and hypervisible one. Visibility did not mean recovery. Rather, it became clear to many Puerto Ricans and on an international stage that Puerto Rico was undergoing a humanitarian crisis.

The intersection of the debt crisis and Hurricane Maria spurred academic responses that used the model of disaster capitalism as framework for the unravelling situation. Hurricane Maria's damages were calculated at $95 billion, a sum larger than the debt, yet la Junta insisted on debt repayment amid the rubble. Naomi Klein turned her attention to Puerto Rico and warned about the shock doctrine and disaster capitalism on the islands post-Maria, and Yarimar Bonilla

[5] 'La Junta' is the colloquial name given to the Fiscal Control Board locally. It is short for Junta de Control Fiscal (FCB in Spanish) but connotes its dictatorial character, as in a military board.

[6] The University of Puerto Rico is the islands' only public higher education institution and arguably the most successful project of its colonial modernity. It has played a central role in the creation of a Puerto Rican middle class and professional workforce, and has long traditions of intellectual achievement in the sciences and humanities. Accounting for only 13.9% of the local budget, it is disproportionately targeted by the Junta in their neoliberal effort to dismantle public infrastructure and silence what has historically been a site of critical dissent of local politics. For more on this debate, see Jirau Arroyo.

and Marisol Lebrón expand on this framework in *Aftershocks of Disaster*, while also complicating the linearity of the crisis itself, reminding us that "disasters are not singular events but ongoing processes" (3). Yet the disaster capitalism model, and that of crisis itself, have been called into question by scholars to address its unequal impact across the population. Hilda Llorens asks "when was capitalism not a disaster?" (Llorens, "The Race of Disaster") to Black, poor Puerto Ricans who have been dispossessed and exploited for centuries. This important framework challenges the framework of crisis—a concept rooted in economic jargon that refers to the valuation of money rather than the well-being of people. Llorens declares: "For my ancestors the capitalist impetus was disastrous from the moment their bodies were conceptualized as racialized chattel and their right to freedom lost" (Llorens). This perspective is rooted in the concept of racial capitalism, which argues that capitalism is borne out of racial stratification. Cedric Robinson proposes the concept of racial capitalism in *Black Marxism,* building on Marxist thought to address the place of race on Marxist ideas. Yet Marx itself had already pointed out that capitalism itself is the crisis.

What is critical about crisis if it has settled in as a kind of disheveled normality? I have mentioned that Hurricane Maria constitutes a visible exception to this, but Yarimar Bonilla has pointed out that even then, the feeling of urgency was met with "a crushing wall of inaction" ("The Wait of Disaster" 2020) and its effects are also ongoing. Thus, what is useful about the term crisis to describe what feels like a permanent phenomenon? Adriana Garriga López has also challenged the utility of crisis as the framework for understanding the events transpiring in Puerto Rico. Also speaking about the "*long durée* of debt," she proposes "do[ing] away with crisis thinking as a point of departure for analyzing the politics of debt without thereby disavowing the real effects of ongoing colonialism, economic recession, and environmental

disruption" ("Debt, Crisis, and Resurgence" 122). I use the framework of crisis in this dissertation to look at the way cultural products and discourses defined by the term are articulated. Yet I agree that the debt crisis might be an insufficient moniker to capture the many intersecting realities it tries to describe. For this, the term "colonial capitalism," coined by Marisol Lebrón is also useful.

I have thus far outlined the crisis as a series of economic and political events, but the main focus of this dissertation is to consider the aesthetic and affective dimensions of the crisis. As a term, crisis evokes a range of not only economic but also political and aesthetic histories. In chapter one, I use Diana Taylor's concept of the 'scenario' to understand the crisis as a staging of events that follows a script given its conventions in other contexts. This dissertation showcases the government playbook of austerity and fiscal (ir)responsibility, the public figures that intervene the conversation, and the resistance to the playbook through protests and artistic production. Each chapter examines the debt crisis from the perspective of these crisis actors, and the crisis is the stage that allows us to examine these different cultural productions together.

The Coloniality of Debt

The increased destitution of the current moment should not obscure the structural colonial conditions that brought it into being. The economic crisis is the result of an accumulation of neoliberal policies that were also inherently colonial. I quote at length from a superb summary of the events leading up to the debt crisis:

> This historical background interlocks with the current debt crisis, in that the economy never provided enough formal employment, and had been declining since the 1970s. Debt

> was issued to address government deficits for decades, orchestrated by two equally corrupt political parties engaged in entrenched clientelism. As a US territory, Puerto Rico's municipal bonds were touted as triple tax exempt from federal, state, and local taxes since 1917. In 1984, Puerto Rico was arbitrarily excluded from amendment of the federal bankruptcy law, making its municipal bonds even more attractive throughout the United States. When the debt far outsized the country's gross national product (GNP), ratings agencies in 2014 downgraded Puerto Rico's bonds to junk status. Vulture hedge funds that were also players in Greece, Argentina, and Detroit debt crises preyed upon the broken system, with bonds purchased pennies to the dollar and loans made to the tune of 746% interest rates, with the help of key banking institutions that reaped profits from the deals charging exorbitant fees (Llorens and Stanchich 86).

This sequence of facts reveals the many ways the debt is made possible by Puerto Rico's colonial status, from a systemic and long-standing lack of economic development, to tax exemptions on bonds, and the inability to declare bankruptcy. Yet they also show the role of local politics—deep-seated corruption of local parties—and global indebtedness networks—outrageous interest rates and hedge funds that play on public debts globally. I thus argue that Puerto Rico's debt is inherently colonial, but not for that reason exceptional.

While my research focuses on local specificities of the debt, it is clear that the structures of indebtedness are globally present. Many countries of the Global South are deeply indebted, and their so-called national or sovereign debts are owed to countries that used to be their colonizers a few centuries ago. As Graeber states: "Third World debtor nations are almost exclusively countries that have at one time been attacked and conquered by European countries—often, the very countries to whom they now owe money" (*Debt* 5).

The circumstances are rooted in the US colonization of Puerto Rico, which is ongoing. Yet there are specific ways in which debt embodies and heightens coloniality. In her recent book *Colonial Debts,* Rocio Zambrana tracks the debt's historical intertwining with colonialism and coloniality. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to colonialism as the ongoing institution of colonial rule by the US in Puerto Rico. When speaking about coloniality, I refer to Anibal Quijano's concept of "the coloniality of power," which addresses the afterlives of colonialism as an institution throughout Latin America and globally. These afterlives are a hierarchy of race, class, and gender that structures power in the post-colonial world. Puerto Rico is not part of this post-colonial world due to its present colonial condition, but it has still inherited these hierarchies. As Zambrana states: "the case of Puerto Rico presses us to consider the continuation of the colonial condition in its afterlife. The actualization of race/gender as the central technology of modernity/coloniality is guided by the operation of capital in its specificity, in the present juncture, neoliberal financialized capitalism" (9). Put simply, the crisis does not impact everyone equally. Llorens' claim about the way coastal Black Puerto Ricans live outside the financial strictures of the crisis is important, but it is also true that debt is "an apparatus that actualizes, updates, reinstalls a race/gender/class hierarchy" (Zambrana 24). Throughout this dissertation, the use of 'Puerto Ricans' does not refer to a homogenous mass of undifferentiated victims. Puerto Ricans are colonized subjects regardless of their place in these hierarchies, but it is crucial to understand the differentiated consequences of neoliberal coloniality for Black, female, queer, and poor subjects and to remember that the colonized elites are responsible for and profit off the crisis. Raquel Salas Rivera's poem in *The Tertiary* (a book I examine in depth in chapter two) says it best:

la mayoría de los miembros de la junta son puertorriqueños,

> *reflejando el compromiso del presidente de asegurar que los puertorriqueños estén bien representados,* says the white house says we are represented by these puertorriqueños (*Lo terciario* 72).

Time Under Crisis

I first had the idea for this dissertation in late 2016: PROMESA had just passed, I had just moved to the US to pursue my PhD, and I was furious. It was my first year of graduate school and I thought academic knowledge was a necessary front for countering the most recent and dramatic example of US colonialism's devaluation of Puerto Rican life. Time passed, Hurricane Maria passed, the crisis worsened and the shock that accompanied earlier rage turned into stupor and exhaustion. The rule of PROMESA had settled in and Hurricane Maria turned vibrant political anger into a heartbreak so overbearing and intimate it made intellectual rationalization of it seem futile and out of touch. The Hurricane was followed by a tidal wave of disaster capitalism and austerity measures coming so quick and from so many fronts they were impossible to keep up with (by design, of course). During this period, I witnessed the topic of the crisis go from the small corner of economists' pronouncements to take center stage of Puerto Rican studies, the chorus of scholars, artists, journalists, and others so loud that it made Puerto Rico hypervisible, but the woes kept piling on. In 2019, the protests that ousted now former governor Ricardo Roselló offered a collective catharsis and respite. Yet the unfolding magnitude of the catastrophe and depth of the pain made it hard to find meaning in the work I was doing: I grew weary of documenting our collective exploitation and worried my work might be contributing to romanticizing the crisis or trauma porn. The order of my chapters roughly follows

this temporal trajectory of affective engagement with my objects, from denunciation towards the joy of the possibilities of decolonization, following Garriga López's understanding of "decolonization as a political-economic, epistemological, affective, and cultural project in Puerto Rico" ("Debt" 123).

My own affective reactions to the temporality of the crisis are not generalizable, of course, and they hinge on my own positionality: having left in 2016 meant I did not have to experience the material effects and traumas first-hand, and instead got to write about them from the comfort of an elite US institution. But what is certain is that the crisis has also shifted Puerto Rico's perception/relation to time. Yarimar Bonilla has noted a temporal rupture in Puerto Ricans' perception of time, speaking specifically about life post-Hurricane Maria and the "temporality of disaster," which she defines as "how catastrophic events (including colonialism) […] impact our experience of time, progression, social action, and political possibility" (Bonilla, "The Wait of Disaster" 78). Bonilla applies this concept to the time after Hurricane Maria, when, she states:

> The temporal mode of emergency also comes with a heightened state of awareness, a surge of adrenaline, a perceived need to move fast, to act quick, to fix, to save, to repair, to restore. This in turn creates the expectation of change: a desire and perceived need to move out of the present state. That is, there is an assumption that the temporal mode of *emergency* will be fleeting, quickly shifting over into that of *recovery*. (78)

This can broadly be applied to the debt crisis if understood as a historical moment of heightened tension, where the instinctive response is to expect an end or solution, to attempt to resolve. Yet the debt presents itself as a crisis that exceeds all space and time: the number of $72 billion is so large (it is the largest municipal debt in US history) it feels almost impossible to quantify,

infinite, and in La Junta's debt negotiations, agreements only guarantee future bankruptcy declarations, an endless loop with no end in sight. On the temporality of crisis, Lauren Berlant has warned us about the difference between crisis and ordinary time: "calling a *crisis* that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives that crisis in ordinary time" (103).

The coloniality of the debt crisis evidences the presence and persistence of the (colonial) past in the present. I have just defined coloniality as the afterlives of colonialism, which suggests it might be the residue of a phenomenon that is past. Rocio Zambrana reminds us, though, that "the present *is* the past" (*Colonial Debts* 14, emphasis in the original) inasmuch as coloniality is "an operating rationality and sensibility organizing the very reproduction of life through the attrition of life in the present" (13). In this dissertation, I attend to the ways aesthetic imaginaries of the past emerge with more frequency, evidence that the past not only haunts the present but spectrally constitutes it. Literary and cultural engagement with indebtedness is automatically an engagement with coloniality, and the works I examine show us the temporal interplay between past, present, and future this brings up. Under the coloniality of debt, the past is a constitutive part of the present, and it also determines the future. Reflecting on the temporality of colonialism, Sandra Ruiz says:

> It is difficult to ignore how the colonial history of Puerto Rico and the United States is always beginning again—it's an infinite project that forces one to contend with the future, even in spaces of present and foreseeable violence. It is also a project in temporal looping whereby actions to redress the past lead us into the future and back again to something prior; this is the affective consequence of colonialism—an active state in the

> here and now, looping forward and back into itself as if time never started or stopped ticking. (3)

There is movement in Ruiz's description of colonial time. This kind of temporal swaying evokes the movement found in marronage, as defined by Neil Roberts, where "marronage is a multidimensional, constant act of flight" (9) that requires constant movement and is thus located in the "liminal and transitional social space between slavery and freedom" (4). As such, in the liminal space within the movements of colonial time that Ruiz proposes, we find acts of maroon flight: resistance that does not aim towards liberation as a static and final place but is fleeting. The works I study invoke the temporal movement between colonial past and future in both form and content. From *Hamilton*'s visual resurrection of US colonial imaginaries—which had Puerto Rican statehooders dressed up like US founding fathers in a performance protest against US colonization in Puerto Rico—to poetic stagings of a liberated future that are rooted in the ruins of the present, we see aesthetic and political movement between past, present, and future as maroon flights of resistance that posit decolonization not as a static place always looming in the future but enacted in the present.

Junk Status: A Long History of Colonial Tropes

Consider this headline: "the credit rating agency Standard & Poor's downgraded Puerto Rico's general obligation bonds to junk levels Tuesday" (Fletcher). In 2014, I remember seeing this headline everywhere on the island, huge billboards with the word 'JUNK' written over generic images of stocks reports, and not really understanding what it all meant. I only knew Puerto Rico was being described as junk and being financially penalized for it. As it turns out, Puerto Rico's credit was being downgraded—by Wall Street agencies—which would make it

harder to borrow, but increased interests and thus profits for vulture and hedge funds buying the debt at pennies on the dollar. The junk classification was a perhaps too on-the-nose metaphor for the calculus at play: the island suffered (became junk) while Wall Street profited off the 'junk,' while also accusing the 'junk' of its junk status. Inevitably, and even for those who were not able to follow this calculus (like myself) there was a moral judgement of Puerto Rico (and thus Puerto Ricans) in this labeling. In her study about debt in the context of the 2008 crisis, Annie McClanahan notes a contradiction in the logic of credit scores: while contemporary credit scores are supposed to be "scientific, technical, objective, and profoundly impersonal," debt continues to be "personal and moral, and repaying it a matter of individual and social responsibility" (*Dead* 55-56). When displaced from an individual onto a public debt and a territory, the judgement travels from those borrowing (a powerless colonial and corrupt local elite) onto everyday Puerto Ricans, interpolating their very social identity. The term junk is itself negatively charged with moral judgement, and the reporting of this event was accompanied by racist tropes of Puerto Rican irresponsibility and dysfunction. The 'junk' headlines worked to transfer the blame (and thus guilt) of indebtedness onto Puerto Ricans that had no power over being indebted, and pathologized Puerto Rico as a 'junk' place that was naturally bound to this credit status.

The junk classification could then be read as a recent manifestation of a long history of racist tropes that Spanish and US colonial authorities have used to pathologize Puerto Ricans as inferior and justify colonial intervention. The junk episode is merely a more recent, neoliberal and financialized expression of the old beliefs that Puerto Ricans are lazy, docile, dirty, unable to govern themselves, and guilty of their misfortunes. These tropes are foundational to both Spanish and US colonial policies, have been disseminated by imperial US media, publicly pronounced by US Presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Donald Trump, and continue to shape the relationship

between Puerto Rico and the US. To offer an example, in 1899 *The New York Times* published an article that commented, referring to Puerto Ricans: "[t]he people are a light-hearted, simple-minded, harmless, indolent, docile people, and while they gamble and are fond of wine, women, music, and dancing, they are honest and sober" (Harvey, "Americanizing"). This was a generalized sentiment to justify US presence, but it was not limited to US colonial authorities. These beliefs have also been championed by Puerto Rican cultural and political elites: Rene Marqués; *El puertorriqueño dócil y otros ensayos* and Antonio S. Pedreira's *Insularismo* are some of the clearest examples. The cultural productions I examine all express a rearticulation of these beliefs within the context of neoliberal coloniality.

Chapter Structure

In each chapter, I will discuss how these tropes are activated in the discussion of the debt crisis. In chapter one, I argue that Lin-Manuel Miranda's advocacy to US Congress in favor of debt restructuring in the form of the PROMESA bill places him as an indebted subject that follows the paternalist legacy of *El puertorriqueño dócil.* I offer an analysis of his musical *Hamilton: An American Musical* and argue it is an aesthetic, staged example of the coloniality of power. I then close read written and performed interventions in favor of PROMESA and *Hamilton*'s arrival to Puerto Rico.

In the second chapter, I examine poems by Mara Pastor, Raquel Salas Rivera, Nicole Delgado, Pedro Pietri and Aurora Levins Morales to consider how they engage with and ultimately refuse the responsibility of indebtedness. This responsibility is built upon a sense of guilt that is feminized and relies on female obedience (and docility) that these poems challenge. I argue that this poetry produces theories on the affective and embodied dimensions of debt, which

equates debt with coloniality, refuses the injunction to pay, and in so doing constructs decolonial imaginaries rooted in communality and care. As such, the poetry I work with produces knowledge on debt that counters the supposition that it must be paid, links it to its colonial history, and offers blueprints for futures outside indebtedness.

In the final chapter, I analyze El Gran Combo's hit song "Y no hago más ná" (*La Universidad de la salsa* 1983) as a call to appropriate the charge of laziness historically used against Puerto Ricans. I track the historical presence of this belief across centuries of Puerto Rican colonial policy and in the context of the islands' colonial labor history. I then move on to examine how Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, the largest local financial institution, and a protagonist of the debt crisis, re-activates this charge in a media campaign where they have El Gran Combo re-write the song and turn it into a neoliberal bootstrap anthem of individual self-enterprise, as another maneuver of transferring the blame of indebtedness onto the people.

As outlined, this dissertation combines salsa songs, a Broadway play, contemporary Puerto Rican poetry, and the methodologies of literary close reading, discourse analysis, popular culture and advertising analysis with the frameworks of finance and decolonial theories. The different genres and perspectives each have their own histories and internal logics, but they are brought together by their participation in the scenario of the debt crisis, and the ways I weave together offer an understanding of engagement with and resistance to indebtedness from a (de)colonial context. This work does not aspire to be a thorough history or indexing of the aesthetic products of the crisis, but rather wants to offer an account of the politics of debt and coloniality in Puerto Rican culture during the past twenty years.

Chapter 1- ‘Hamilton,’ *Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Indebted Docility*

“And when push
comes to shove
I will send a fully armed battalion
to remind you of my love!”

-Lin-Manuel Miranda, “You’ll Be Back”

On the evening of January 11th 2019, a group of approximately twenty people assembled on the plaza surrounding el Centro de Bellas Artes Luis A. Ferré, Puerto Rico’s premier concert hall, named after the founder of the New Progressive Party of Puerto Rico. They carried a long banner that read ‘Puerto Rico Estadidad’ and handwritten signs that featured quotes from Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton: An American Musical* such as “We are not throwing away our shot!” “Are we a nation of states? What’s the state of our nation?” and “We want to be in the room where it happens,” all ending with the hashtag “#STATEHOODFORPRNOW.” It was the night of the premiere of *Hamilton* on Puerto Rican soil, an important homecoming for its creator Miranda, and the birth date of Alexander Hamilton. The event brought a lot of international

media attention, local and North American celebrities and dignitaries, and was a national 'happening' for Puerto Rico. The protestors decided to use this spotlight, as well as the viral one-liners from the musical's script, to call attention to their cause. The group's leaders were dressed in colonial garb echoing the musical's costumes. They gave interviews to international media outlets where they expressed admiration for both Hamilton and Miranda and used the revolutionary rhetoric of the play to argue their case for Puerto Rican statehood. Dan Santiago, who identified as the spokesperson for civil society for statehood, declared that in the same way that—as the play captures—the thirteen colonies of the US had to fight their colonial oppressor, the British Empire, because of unjust treatment, Puerto Rico was tired of one-hundred and twenty years of colonial governance and was demanding to become a US state. This attempt was deemed foolish by most of Puerto Rican society and its media—the online newspaper Noticel titled their headline "Invocan al espiritu de Hamilton en reclamo estadista para PR." The protest was unusual in that it invoked leftist and revolutionary rhetoric at the service of the historically conservative statehood movement. It employed the language typically associated with pro-independence anti-colonial struggle to make its case and used the musical's political and aesthetic ethos to ignite a contemporary debate on Puerto Rican politics.

Santiago and the civil society statehooders are far from the first to invoke the musical's rhetoric to speak to contemporary political and social issues. In the US, quotes from the play have been activated and become popular culture parlance for political issues associated with the US liberal class, such as "Immigrants, we get the job done" or for personal inspiration (often associated with racial and/or ethnic uplift, like the many Latinx youth who write the line on their graduation cap) "I am not throwing away my shot" (Miranda, "My Shot"). Yet the protest aptly dramatized the amount of forces at play in the staging of *Hamilton* in Puerto Rico, showcasing

how the theater piece and its production are inherently and irrevocably tied to politics that transcend those presented in the play and which are of great consequence for contemporary political reality. It also embodies the collapsing of temporalities that *Hamilton* activates: early colonial US history being invoked and performed in 2019 at the service of Puerto Rican decolonization. The event also speaks to Puerto Rico's current political context, where the economic crisis and its regress to harsher forms of colonialism under the Fiscal Control Board have unmasked the veneer of self-determination granted by the Estado Libre Asociado.

This chapter explores the *roles*[7] of *Hamilton: An American Musical* and Miranda in Puerto Rico's unfolding crisis drama. I examine the political and aesthetic investments of *Hamilton* from a Puerto Rican decolonial perspective and in the context of the debt crisis. I analyze of some of the song's lyrics to reveal its ideological investments and views on colonialism as a Puerto Rian listener, arguing that the play's casting and music are a staging of the coloniality of power. I also consider the roles of the Mirandas and of Alexander Hamilton in the imaginary of the play and close read some of Miranda's interventions into the Puerto Rican debt restructuring, which posit him as what I call an indebted docile subject. I look into his familial relations to Leftist and centrist figures of power, using the concepts of genealogy and the debt-bound son to discuss the symbolic debts that drive Miranda's public persona. I take a close look at the production of the play in San Juan in the context of Hurricane Maria recovery, offering casual ethnographic evidence of the event situating it in the broader context of disaster capitalist response to Hurricane Maria. I end by consider the affective engagements of audiences with the play as colonized audiences.

[7] I want to play with the multiple connotations of this word, understood first as a customary function and second as the part played by an actor in a theatrical play/production.

The Scenario of Crisis

In *Zombies, Migrants, and Queers: Race and Crisis Capitalism in Pop Culture*, Camila Fojas suggests that capitalism has its own "storyform" (5) and script which "shap [es] global narratives about crisis as inevitable and ultimately productive in a manner that consolidates U.S. power" (6). Crisis, understood as a necessary and natural part of capitalism's boom and bust cycles, is a fundamental part of this storyform. The intense neoliberalization of the economy over the past half century has intensified the degree and duration of such crises, turning the storyboard of capitalism into a narrative of constant crisis. Crisis produces its own narrative following a set script and conventions.

Following Diana Taylor's elaboration on *The Archive and the Repertoire*, I want to argue that Puerto Rico's economic crisis may be read as a "scenario," which she defines as "meaning-making paradigms which structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes" (28). Taylor refers to scenarios as events which by virtue of their social repetition become legible, such as the event of 'discovery,' (colonization) of one culture by another, which has become a legible ritual in the global imaginary. "The discoverer, conqueror, 'savage,' and native princess, for example, might be staple characters in many Western scenarios" (28). Because of Puerto Rico's economic crisis—its longstanding economic recession, its debt, and the resulting austerity—have all but defined social and political life in Puerto Rico for the past two decades, I want to propose that the crisis itself may be read as a scenario. Economic crises around the globe follow a familiar script and scenario, they all engage in a series of performed conventions: the state requires the people perform culpability for what is represented as a shared moral failing. This scenario allows for the logic of austerity, as the responsibility for the misgivings that created the crisis and debt must also be shared in the form of personal and collective sacrifices.

Understanding crisis as a scenario "structures our understanding" of the way the phenomenon will play out. However, a colonial financial crisis is bound to blur the neat edges of Taylor's scenario theory. The framework is useful to broadly appraise the sequence of events of the financial crisis, but the specificities of colonial capitalism in Puerto Rico complicate neat understandings of the crisis scenario.

The crisis scenario as framework may be problematic because "it allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views over others. In the *Fantasy Island* scenario, for example, we might be encouraged to overlook the displacement and disappearance of native peoples, gender exploitation, environmental impact, and so on" (28). Taylor is referring to the scenario of 'discovery,' which is in fact closely related with Puerto Rico's crisis scenario. Her terms are generally applicable, as the crisis script and scenario also privilege the abstraction of financialization and large-scale, macro imaginaries (think $72 billion debt) while foregoing its localized and material consequences. Taylor continues:

> The *scenario* includes features well theorized in literary analysis, such as narrative and plot, but demands that we also pay attention to milieux and corporal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language. Simultaneously s*etup* and a*ction*, scenarios frame and activate social dramas. The setup lays out the range of possibilities; all the elements are there: encounter, conflict, resolution, and dénouement, for example. These elements, of course, are themselves the product of economic, political and social structures that they, in turn, tend to reproduce. All scenarios have localized meaning, though many attempt to pass as universally valid. Actions and behaviors arising from the setup might be predictable, a seemingly natural consequence of the assumptions, values, goals, power relations, presumed audience, and epistemic grids established by the setup

itself (28-29).

Understanding crisis in these terms allows us to expand on the notion of the script to consider the non-written and non-verbal codes that contribute to the imaginary of crisis. To consider Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hamilton*'s role in the crisis, we must engage with how their aesthetic and performed roles fit into the larger crisis scenario. This requires us to engage with not just the performance of the play itself, but of its role in the larger crisis scenario Puerto Rico presently inhabits. The 'scenario' of the play—in the theatrical sense—marks a profound contrast with the scenario of crisis. Considering both scenarios together will reveal the occlusions and absences the scenario of crisis renders invisible.

Diversity and Inclusion?: Coloniality of Power and the Neoliberal Aesthetics of Hamilton

Hamilton: An American Musical is a Broadway musical that tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, a founding father that migrated from St. Croix to the US and took part in the American Revolution. It's hard to think of a more relevant object of US popular culture in the twenty-first century. There have been a slew of critiques to the show's lack of historical accuracy, glamorization of colonial history, and racial politics, and even more celebratory attention to its success. Yet very few, if any, of these engagements consider the role of Puerto Rico not just in the musical itself, but in its public imaginary. The irony at the center of this erasure is that perhaps the biggest claim to praise for Hamilton is its reckoning with history and its resonances between the historical period it attends to and contemporary politics. Bearing these two things in mind, the way Puerto Rico's colonial history as a territory of the US is both at the center of Miranda's attention yet completely invisible in the play and its reception deserves careful study. How does the celebrated auteur's Puerto Rican origin—and his insistence on

granting visibility to this origin—square against the ideological themes at play in *Hamilton?* How should we reconcile the visibility Miranda gives to Puerto Rico with its absence from the conversation that surrounds the play?

Hamilton employs the formula of the rags-to-riches story to tell the story of one of the United States' founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton. The story is narrated through hip-hop, which along with the casting of solely Black and Brown actors in the production[8] accounts for the play's innovation and incredibly popular success. The first public iteration of the show, the title song "Alexander Hamilton," was performed by Miranda in the White House for the Obamas in 2009, years before the play was staged, foretelling its politics and place in the American political milieu. The show has been said to "capture the political zeitgeist of the Age of Obama" (Romano and Bond Potter 4), embodying the optimistic, centrist-progressive values which are legacy of the Obama presidency.[9] Yet the constant close association to Obama speaks not only to its period, but of the show's multiple and complex entanglements with contemporary politics. In staging the biography of a US founding father, *Hamilton* enacts the period of the American Revolution and post-colonial nation-building. The show has a central and explicit investment with the foundation of the US political system and a celebratory tone that glorifies US political greatness.

The show's popularity stemmed in large part from its unusual casting conceit: Black and Brown actors would play the founding fathers and rap their way through independence and post-colonial nation-building. It was deemed revolutionary by many. This choice is part of what is known in theater development as "conceptual casting," which "assign[s] minority actors to

[8] Except for the role of King George, representing the British empire the American Revolution defeats during the play.

[9] Jeremy Carter, who co-wrote a book that accompanies the production called *Hamilton: The Revolution*, has written about the relationship of the show to Obama's politics in a piece called "Why Hamilton Matters."

conventionally white roles as part of a broader reimagining of a familiar narrative or canonical text" (Herrera 231) or "compositional casting, in which the playwright scripts casting as a constitutive part of the show's composition" (233). Miranda shows a commitment to counter the lack of diversity in theater and the frequent whitewashing of productions.

The casting of the protagonist is itself telling: a Black Gorge Washington and a Black Jefferson are supporting roles to Miranda, a light skinned Puerto Rican. Miranda's racial unmarkedness—since, he has played Dick van Dyke's role in a recent remaking of *Mary Poppins*, which suggested whiteness but did not confirm any specific racial identity—contributes to the promise of diversity as a Latino but allows sufficient ambiguity to suggest whiteness. Miranda mobilizes a sense of Brownness to make the point about immigration and people of color as racially disadvantaged, but he is himself white, and thus so is Hamilton's character.[10]

'The story of America then, told by America now' is one of the play's most popular slogans, and the interplay of historical and contemporary political landscapes is at the center: the casting choice tries to link the contemporary values of diversity and inclusion to the foundational values of US nationhood. Some have argued that the representation gives Black and Brown people ownership over a story they previously felt alienated from, while others have challenged this premise, saying this representation belies the fact that Black people were not present during this period other than as slaves. Perhaps the most biting critic of this idea has been writer Ishmael Reed, who likens the practice to Jews playing Nazis in a Holocaust story (Reed, "Hamilton and the Negro Whispers: Miranda's Consumer Fraud").[11] Regardless of one's position, the

[10] Most recently, Miranda has been heavily critiqued for the casting choices of the film adaptation of *In the Heights*, which represent the historically Black Dominican neighborhood of the same name without casting almost any Afro-Latinos.

[11] Ishmael Reed has since presented a play called "The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda" at the Nuyorican Poets Café on May 23, 2019. The play's script has since been published as a book.

temporality of early colonial America is instrumentalized to speak to the current coloniality of power. Black and Brown actors playing the roles of slave traders and masters while singing the praises of democratic governance pointedly illustrates the hierarchies that outlive colonialism as an institution and continue to shape modern and contemporary reality. The show relishes in the self-aware irony of its casting. The famous quip "Immigrants, we get the job done" (Miranda, Yorktown") is perhaps the most pointed example of a self-reflexive past from the hyper-contemporary moment. Yet the fantasy of representation is a sanitized glossing over the institution of slavery and the horrors of colonialism.

Music accompanies casting in accounting for the originality of the play. Before *Hamilton*, hip hop rarely featured in Broadway, if it did it either flopped or only made a cameo appearance. In 2014, a musical on the life of Tupac Shakur lasted only three weeks. The genre of hip hop was born in the Bronx in the 1970s, which is a way of saying it was born in the Caribbean. Its roots traced back to Jamaica's sound system scene and street parties, and it was African-American, Puerto Rican, and other Afro-Caribbean youth, under circumstances of structural dispossession, who started it. Jamaican-born DJ Kool Herc developed the rhythm breaks technique, Grandmaster Flash, born in Barbados, perfected it (Sherrell). The evolution of hip-hop from subversive anthem of the South Bronx to commodified good was well under way before Miranda got to it, but *Hamilton* made hip-hop palatable to Broadway audiences, a privileged milieu of people that happily paid thousands of dollars for a ticket. Miranda helped make hip-hop more mainstream it ever was before, and here race is again fundamental. He is a well-established Broadway figure who tied the hip-hop to a narrative that worked as a civics lesson, and he was not himself Black. His racial ambiguity contributed to the success of the genre in the play, disassociated from its Blacker and working-class origins. The Caribbean origins of this genre,

and its history of Afro-diasporic struggle, put at the service of the story of a nation that has consistently disenfranchised those very populations was redeeming to some, but may also be read as an example of the hierarchies of race that continue to dominate the 'post-colonial' world.

Historians David Waldstreicher and Jeffrey Pasley examine the musical's participation in the trope of *founders chic*, defined by them as a genre of "admiring portraits of major leaders of the Early [US] republic" (140). According to them, the genre shows four main defining features: one, it is invested in celebrating national pride through the exaltation and romantization of the country's foundational figures; two, it equates the founders' personalities and character with the events that shaped the nation; three, it is politically conservative; and four, it presents the founders as relatable and inspirational, thus erasing flaws as constitutive and serious as slavery. *Hamilton* complies with all these criteria. It is thoroughly invested in glamorizing the foundation of the United States in service of the activation of nationalism in the present, which by definition necessitates an endorsement of American exceptionalism. This invocation of a seemingly-glorious and inspirational past is at the heart of why the musical is considered Obama-era, as it activates this past in the service of a contemporary discourse of diversity that clouds the imperial and settler colonial nature of the state. In representing this time period and events, it is very explicitly putting forward an ideological view of US history. The ideological investments of the play in purporting a celebration of American exceptionalism are at odds with the progressive elements of the play, which are also its aesthetic devices: the use of hip hop and its conceptual casting.

Representing Colonialism in Hamilton

The story told in *Hamilton* is the story of the life of Alexander Hamilton, focusing on his ascent into US politics, which happened during the period of the American Revolution, and the post-independence period. Because the story of US liberation from British colonialism is told from the perspective of Hamilton, who aspired and eventually secured a leading post in the revolutionary war, the musical constantly partakes in and celebrates the greatness of "America." In so doing, it renews under a progressive guise the imperial and exceptionalist rhetoric that has upheld the US as an imperial power. Mainstream criticism of the play lauded this as a success because of the contemporary hip-hop score and the presence of people of color in roles from which they were historically absent. Yet without critical historical revision, their inclusion does not rewrite the violence at the foundation of these events.

The musical's treatment of early nation-building politics is keen—there is a deep interest and attention to the inner workings of government and, in the first act of the musical, anti-colonial arguments against the British empire. The song "Farmer Refuted" is sung by the character of Samuel Seabury, who "present[s] free thoughts on the proceedings of the continental congress" (Miranda, "Farmer") or popular arguments against the Revolutionary War. That such language and themes have been made palatable to large audiences is part of the musical's success. Yet beyond the civics lessons it offers, this illustrates the musical's commitment to political nuance. The song features conservative arguments against the Revolutionary War being outlined and simultaneously mocked by Hamilton and his entourage. The formal construction of the song superimposes the opposing voices of Seabury and Hamilton, to signify the staging of a debate. Seabury lists conservative arguments against the Revolutionary War, Hamilton (Miranda in the cast album) rapping on top of them counterarguments for the revolution and dismissing Seabury's conservatism as outdated: "Chaos and bloodshed already haunt us" and "Why should

a small island across the sea regulate the price of tea?" (Miranda, "Farmer") The island being referred to is Britain, the imperial power who then ruled over the thirteen colonies. These arguments are eerily familiar to Puerto Ricans or anyone with knowledge of the political debates over the island's status. The Puerto Rican listener cannot help but hear a song about the oppression of colonialism and need for independence from the vantage point of the current context of PROMESA and heightened coloniality. Listening from Puerto Rico also reveals the temporal dissonance between the colonial past denounced in the play and the present moment, where similar circumstances of colonialism are glossed over.

The narrative universe of the play is one of pulsing revolutionary energy, and colonialism is an antagonist throughout the entire first act. "You'll Be Back" is a narratively crucial moment in the first Act, King George's response to the revolutionary fervor spearheaded by Hamilton. The song is a show-tune that mixes Broadway conventions a la Rodgers and Hammerstein and an homage to the 'other' British Revolution of the 1960s, coded with musical references to the Beatles. It breaks with the hip-hop soundscape that dominates the play's soundtrack to accentuate its thematic difference. In this way, the song is an important rupture in the play's narrative both visually and aurally and marks the idea of (British) colonialism as a fundamental engine for the revolution the play puts forth. It also marks the racial divide between white Britain and black and hip-hop US, a conciliatory illusion of the play which nonetheless reinforces colonial whiteness.

You say

the price of my love's not a price that you're willing to pay.

You cry

in your tea which you hurl in the sea when you see me go by.

Why so sad?

Remember we made an arrangement when you went away,

now you're making me mad.

Remember, despite our estrangement,

I'm your man (Miranda, "You'll").

The song is a break-up letter from King George to the newly formed thirteen colonies, where the trope of abusive romantic relationship between colonizer and colonized is invoked to denounce the toxic nature of colonial oppression. As such, King George plays the role of patriarchal abuser, which equates colonial oppression to toxic masculinity. The end of the stanza with the phrase "I'm your man" likens imperial abuse to patriarchal domination. It relies on the trope of abusive love and dependency to persuade to keep the colonizer in its grip: "don't throw away this thing we had/cuz when push comes to shove/I will kill my friends and family to remind you of my love." Colonialism is denounced as violent and evil—"I will send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love," (Miranda, "You'll") yet by placing the denunciation in the voice of the colonizer, and masking colonial domination as love, the song ironizes this domination, celebrating its obsoleteness. The song and King George's appearances in the first act of the play are also the most humorous moments of the play. This presents colonialism as comic relief—a form of evil so antiquated that it gets laughed at.

King George is the only white actor in the play, which marks his place as oppressor and outsider. Yet actor Johnathan Groff's performance (and subsequent actors in the role) suggest queerness through subtly effeminate mannerisms, which both reinforces and ironizes the patriarchal masculinity suggested in the lyrics. The show thus sustains a critique of the role of

masculinity within colonialism, yet seems to be oblivious to how its condemning rhetoric of colonialism is at odds with the US's settler colonial origins and continuing colonial endeavors.

Act I narrates the Revolutionary War, portraying Hamilton as its ambitious "young, scrappy and hungry" hero, its ideals as progressive ("Immigrants: we get the job done" and "We'll never be free until we end slavery") and its victory as a global ("The world turned upside down," which is the title of the song that narrates the victory). King George's character reprises his song at the end of the act, "What Comes Next," singing:

> What comes next?
>
> You've been freed.
>
> Do you know how hard it is to lead?
>
> You're on your own.
>
> Awesome. Wow.
>
> Do you have a clue what happens now?
>
> Oceans rise.
>
> Empires fall.
>
> It's much harder when it's all your call (Miranda, "What").

When the end of colonial domination is inevitable, the colonial power embodied by King George warns the new country about the risks of sovereignty and the difficulty of the task of defining a country's ethos rather than merely defending its existence. The next task would be defining a character for the nation, and the line "oceans rise/empires fall" naturalizes colonial order and foretells the US's subsequent rise to imperial power. In *Prospero's Isles: The Presence of the*

Caribbean in the American Imaginary, Diane Accaria and Rodolfo Popelnik remind us that "the concept and vision of empire was central to the ideology and consciousness of the Founding Fathers of the United States" (3). Yet even though Hamilton is framed as *Hamilton*'s hero, the second act comments on his deeds for the nation and thus his role in the character the nation acquired. These themes are glossed over to accommodate for Hamilton's heroics within the musical's structure but are nonetheless telling of Hamilton's place in the foundation of the US, especially when read from the vantage point of contemporary Puerto Rico.

Caribbean Migrations and the Uplift Genre

The play's opening line situates its origin in the Caribbean, described as "a forgotten spot […] impoverished in squalor." This view of the Caribbean echoes "the idea of American positional superiority over Caribbean 'underdevelopment'" (Accaria and Popelnik 3). The play reproduces the imperial vision of the Founding Father it celebrates, despite being produced by a diasporic Caribbean subject, and despite being expressed in a highly syncretic music genre (hip hop) that owes itself almost entirely to the influence of Caribbean creolization. In representing a migration from the Caribbean to the US, it situates Hamilton as a Caribbean diasporic subject, but the uplift narrative the story presents does not allow for an exploration of this other than cliches of a spectral and backwards Caribbean origin that must be escaped.

The rags-to-riches, rugged individualism, uplift narrative, is one of the oldest and most popular genres in US literature, following a tradition that spans from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, and the Horatio Alger stories to *The Great Gatsby.* Yet the fact that these lines are rapped brings up Miranda's most immediate tradition: the hip-hop self-made man narrative (itself indebted to rugged

individualism). The uplift narrative as a genre is itself rooted in a particular financial vision: it relies on notions of private property and capitalist accumulation as markers of success. These notions harken back to the figure of Alexander Hamilton himself: he founded the First United States Bank, which would transform into what is today the Federal Reserve, and was perceived as "eager[…] to cater to the demands of the wealthy and willingness to merge private gain with public interest" (O'Malley 124). Hamilton is mostly remembered today for being "the father of national debt," (O'Malley 120) and Miranda's musical has managed to sanitize his image by "changing Hamilton from a symbol of elitist management to a figure of romantic populism" (120).

In the Federalist papers, Hamilton writes: "Money is, with propriety, considered as the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion, and enables it to perform its most essential functions" (*No. 30*). For Hamilton, money was the spiritual and existential engine of the post-colonial nation he was building, which all but guaranteed the imperial path it would take. This helps explains the choice of the uplift genre: the values of Hamilton the man align with those of the story in their celebration of money. This is another way the Caribbean is spectrally invoked: in *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean*, historian Peter James Hudson reveals the inherently imperial origins of Wall Street and the US banking system. Hudson sustains that the expansion of Wall Street was concomitant with the project of US colonial expansion at the turn of the nineteenth century, with a strong focus on Caribbean expansion, where "it participated in the creation, replication, and reordering of Caribbean economies on racial lines while helping to reproduce the racist imaginaries and cultures in which finance capital was embedded" (7). There is a clear line to be traced in US financial and political ideology from Hamilton's financial vision to US colonial expansion to

Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century to Puerto Rico's indebtedness today. As Ed Morales reminds us, Hamilton created "a central element of American development that haunts Puerto Rico to this day: he institutionalized the true nature of power in the United States as the ability of its banking class to engage in debt speculation, and concentrate[ed] fiscal power in the hands of an elite core of powerful investors" (280).

The Caribbean locus of Alexander Hamilton is also obviously fundamental for Miranda's choice to write a musical on a founding father of the US republic, it is precisely this framing as a Caribbean immigrant which initially allows him to approach the subject. Yet throughout the musical itself—the second act especially—one can see Miranda grappling with the nature of Hamilton's role in the US nation. The second act is kicked off by Hamilton's inaugural roles in post-independence US nation-building. The opening lines of Act II's first song, "What'd I Miss" say: "How does the bastard orphan,/immigrant decorated war vet/unite the colonies through more debt?" (Miranda) The mere juxtaposition of the words colony and debt in this line eerily allude to Puerto Rico's current predicament. Descriptions of Hamilton's work throughout the second act try to assuage but cannot evade Hamilton's ties to finance and Wall Street. In "Cabinet Battle #2" Thomas Jefferson's character debates Hamilton by accusing him of debt creation: "You accumulate debt, you accumulate power" (Miranda). The song vaguely thematizes what was one of Hamilton's signature achievements: the creation of national and states' debts. In a later song, Jefferson quips: "Our poorest citizens, our farmers, live ration/to ration/as Wall Street robs 'em blind in/search of chips to cash in" (Miranda, "Washington"). Jefferson's argument against Hamilton sounds similar to contemporary resistance to Wall Street vultures in Puerto Rico, the investment economy and the La Junta's ceaseless austerity, which have intensely impoverished the Puerto Rican population. Painting Hamilton as a Wall Street

vulture, in a piece that sets out to celebrate him, tells of the extent of the evils he designed and is celebrated and memorialized for. We can conclude that Puerto Rico's debt crisis is in some ways the direct orchestration of Hamilton's design, as he put in place the structures of debt that are still used today.

Another eerie way Puerto Rico may be present in the musical is in the climactic song "Hurricane." The theme of hurricanes is before-then present in the musical, serving as the backdrop for Hamilton's tragic life in the Caribbean and migration to New York. This song centralizes the Caribbean, not as specter but as physical presence, and uses the physical hurricane of Hamilton's past as an analogy for present personal turmoil, upon his marriage and career being destroyed by a sex scandal. It also draws a parallel of "writing [his] way out," overcoming the adversity of his youth (a physical hurricane) and the present (metaphorical) one through his writing. While "Hurricane" in this song is an abstraction and an analogy, its brooding tone, placement in the story's climax, (the sex scandal, the hero's downfall) and choreography make it a powerful moment in the story. It is eerie thus, in the context of Hurricane Maria in 2017, two years after Hamilton's Broadway premiere, mainly because of Miranda's entanglement with debt politics and the wave of disaster capitalism that has fueled visitor-economy models of investment on the island in its wake. In *Hamilton*, hurricane is an analogy for personal triumph over adversity, while in Puerto Rico hurricane is still a raw and traumatic signifier of catastrophe (both natural and political). In fact, it was Hurricane Maria which (partially) inspired Miranda to bring the production to Puerto Rico, as a philanthropic means of contributing to the recovery of the island, but arguably leading disaster capitalist philanthropy efforts. Wall Street, debt politics and colonialism are all present in the musical as specters of the Puerto Rican crisis which haunt

the play's narrative of triumph. Miranda is also a central figure of Puerto Rico's debt crisis, as we will see in the following section.

Patriarchal Lineages: Hamilton and Miranda

For Miranda, choosing Hamilton as the theme of a musical is a strange choice altogether, if one considers his Puerto Rican background and public performance of his Puerto Rican identity. Miranda's celebrity persona is at least partially built on his Puerto Rican identity, which he frequently and publicly flaunts. His career beginnings relied on his Latinx identity: his first musical *In the Heights* tells the story of Latinos in Washington Heights, and its soundscape consists of genres such as bachata, salsa and merengue. His public persona, built at least partially through his Twitter, constantly displays references to Latinx currency jokes, the Spanish language, and Puerto Rico. As such, the leap from the aesthetic and thematic locus of Latinidad to the uber-American foundational tale of *Hamilton* seems unexpected, but Miranda has commented on the relationship between both musicals as part of his framing of his own Latinidad. Miranda navigates his multiple identities— Puerto Rican, Latinx and American – carefully in order to situate himself in both mainstream American and Latinx representations. When asked how he elevates the Latinx themes of *In the Heights* in *Hamilton,* he asserted that *Hamilton* "actually doubles-down on the themes of *In the Heights*" because it is ultimately the story of an immigrant from the Caribbean: "the story of an immigrant who comes here with nothing and makes a life for himself" ("Luis and Lin-Manuel Miranda). Framing Alexander

Hamilton as a Caribbean immigrant allows Miranda to link a white founding father tale with his family's white Latino narrative of migration, as he tells his father in a joint interview of both: "When I realized he [Hamilton] came from the Caribbean I was like, I know this guy. He's you" ("Luis and Lin-Manuel Miranda"). Ignoring the fact that the real Alexander Hamilton is white, he combines the clichés of immigrant uplift and founders chic to propose a commodified vision of Latinidad that is not at odds with the foundational myths of American exceptionalism. By linking his father's own immigrant story to Hamilton's, Miranda proposes a brand of commodified Latinidad that reinforces the myth of the American Dream, which the experiences of structural marginalization of millions of Latino immigrants in the US constantly belie.

Miranda's own experiences growing up as a second-generation immigrant greatly inform their familial narrative. In media interviews, he has referenced his experience going to an elementary school of mostly privileged children in Manhattan and being caught between the "two different worlds" of Latino home and Anglo school: "All my friends were Jewish, because that is who goes to Hunter. I was Lin at school, and Lin-Manuel at home. I was a totally different person at home than I was at school. All my friends lived on the Upper West Side or the Upper East Side, and I'd speak to their nannies in Spanish" (Mead). This allusion to a form of cultural in-betweeness is typical narrative of second-generation Latinos, which Miranda uses to connect his personal upbringing with common values of Latinidad. The strategic use of Spanish is an example, as he has access to Spanish as the language of the immigrant working class despite his more privileged upbringing.

Miranda has also repeatedly alluded to the parallels between Alexander Hamilton and himself, and close inspection of the play's lyrics confirm this, with themes such as writing as a means of reaching social mobility, success and personal and societal transformation. Miranda's

protagonist frequently echoes its creator's own life, and Miranda sees as both and inspirational and aspirational figure. A lot of the show's characterization of Hamilton resonates with Miranda's own life: the song "My Shot" about personal ambition and success, echoes his own rise in fame as a result of the musical with lines such as "I prob'ly shouldn't brag, but dag,/I amaze and astonish" and "With every word, I drop knowledge" (Miranda, "My Shot") the hip hop ethos and composition of the song a meta commentary on the talent contained in the song and play itself.

Writing itself is a theme characterizing Hamilton throughout the play: "the only weapon Hamilton has to defend himself […] is his pen," (Sherrell 202) the technology that makes Hamilton remarkable and which he uses to rise to national fame and later save himself from national disgrace. Miranda's writing of the play has brought him glory as well, and he employs the medium to discuss Puerto Rico in an op-ed I will discuss in the next section. This blurring between Miranda and Hamilton is central to our understanding of the play and Miranda's role in the Puerto Rican crisis.

The play's uplift narrative is also reflected in the Miranda's own story and family. Luis A. Miranda migrated from Arecibo to New York and after obtaining a degree from NYU, built a political career that endeared him to New York City's Democratic Party establishment. Before this, Miranda Sr. already had remarkable political roots in his family— Gilberto Concepción de Gracia, the founder of the Independence Party in Puerto Rico, is Lin-Manuel's great-uncle. This makes Miranda a sort of heir of the Puerto Rican anti-colonial movement, and even the story of his name is testament to the anti-colonial tradition he seems destined to fulfill. Miranda himself has said that he was named after the poem "nana roja para mi hijo Lin-Manuel," written by 1960s Puerto Rican poet Jose Manuel Torres Santiago. Lin-Manuel (the subject of the poem) is

"un bebé rojo" born out of revolution and who will grow up to wage just war against "los asesinos yankis." (Miranda, "Gmorning") Miranda expands on the theme of genealogy in his feature in Residente Calle 13's (René Pérez) "Intro" to his album *DNA.* He raps about being third cousins with Pérez:

> Primo/Tu y yo descendimos de Gilberto Concepción de Gracia/Fundador del Partido Independentista de Puerto Rico/Abogado de Pedro Albizu Campos en Nueva York/Nacimos con revolución en las venas. Entre ritmo de bomba y plena/Y estamos conectados en las malas y en las buenas (Residente, *Intro ADN/DNA*)

Miranda's invocation of Concepción de Gracia and Albizu Campus in a claim to common lineage with Residente—an internationally renowned rapper from Puerto Rico, famous for his Leftist critiques of the Puerto Rican government and for articulating a pan-Latin American notion of struggle[12]—suggests that he inherits a revolutionary legacy of anti-colonial politics. In this song, Miranda directly alludes to genealogy as a driving force of his politics. It also suggests that his politics are in fact revolutionary and anticolonial, (as his ancestors' were) which we've seen in the analysis of *Hamilton* is not true. In a response to Miranda's public reading of the poem that inspired his name in a cultural event in San Juan, Rebollo-Gil notes the bitter irony of Miranda's reading juxtaposed to his actions at the time: "the things you can say against colonialism in the colony and the things you can say about the colony on the mainland and still get to play at building empire on Broadway" (Rebollo-Gil *Counterpunch*). Rebollo-Gil's playful turn of phrase questions the irony at the center of Miranda's production of Hamilton and its staging in Puerto Rico specifically, it speaks to the way Miranda's performance of politics

[12] Martinez Arias has rightly problematized Residente's construction of a harmonious and homogenous Latin American identity.

conveniently shifts to please diverging audiences in the continental United States and in its colonial possessions.

In July 2016, just four months after Miranda's US media tour in support of PROMESA, Miranda stood on the stage of the Sala Antonio Matos Paoli, where *Hamilton* would be performed two and a half years later, and read the poem that inspired his name. The poem was written by José Manuel Torres Santiago, a central member of the Colectivo Caguana, a 1960s collective that espoused a Leftist and anti-colonial poetics. It reflects on the naming of a newborn son and his social inheritance in the politically charged 1960s. The poem thus also takes up on the themes of genealogy and inheritance as inextricably tied to politics. Unapologetically militant, the poem is also a dark reflection on the looming death of the newborn: "Antes, y cuando tú naciste, no sé por qué,/pensé tu muerte…" suggesting the inheritance of coming into the world where "los capitalistas, los mercaderes de humanos […] habían tendido el asesinato y sembrado la Guerra" (Miranda, "Story"). Listing Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico as sites of US imperial violence, the looming death is a result of military recruitment and the lack of democracy: "…Saber que ibas directo a la democracia/ (democracia en este lado es todos los días/miseria, mierda, guerra)" (Miranda, "Story"). Miranda's reading is a calculated performance as he enunciates his Spanish carefully and reads forcefully. Towards the end, as the poem closes with the line "gritarás conmigo/la guerra justa contra los asesinos yanquis" ("Intervención") he lets out a chuckle and shrugs at the melodramatic militancy of the poem, a foreign and improbable litany that Miranda can only understand as performative and in the past. Yet, as he performs the words to his musical on that very stage three years later, the affective register is remarkably different as he utters, as Hamilton in a soliloquy he pronounces right before his death: "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory," (Miranda, "World")

echoing the penchant for death of the poem, and reflecting on his legacy and his role in the construction of the nation of 'asesinos yanquis.'

> Legacy, what is a legacy?
>
> It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see
>
> I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me
>
> America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me
>
> You let me make a difference, a place where even orphan immigrants
>
> Can leave their fingerprints and rise up ("Miranda, "World").

In contrast to the legacy to be inherited by a Puerto Rican baby in the 1960s under US imperialism, Hamilton celebrates the nation he helped build and presents a vision of the nation as welcoming to immigrants, in keeping with the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion discussed above.

Indebted Genealogies: Lin-Manuel as the Debt-Bound Son

Miranda's father was active in anti-colonial politics in Puerto Rico in his youth, but his migration and upward mobility (his own story of success) transformed into proximity and alliance with US centrist political power, which means imperial complicity. He also features prominently in his son's career: they are frequently interviewed together, and in Miranda's celebrity construction, the father signifies the Puerto Rican homeland. Lin-Manuel Miranda *inherits* his father's Caribbean immigrant narrative of uplift. He reaps and amplifies its success. As such, he is *indebted* to his father and his father's story, and *Hamilton* (the musical) is a way to pay his filial debt. Asian-American literature scholars have coined the concept of the 'debt-

bound' son or daughter to speak about the filial duty that is culturally expected of the children of Asian immigrants for their sacrifices made to provide them with a better life. This understanding of debt exceeds the financial relation and "becomes entangled in conceptions of familial obligation and emotional guilt" (Wu and Agarwal 5). I argue that there is a similar dynamic at play in the public construction of the father-son relationship between them and the public narrative Miranda offers about his family and its relationship to the play. Miranda (the son) inherits the dowry of anti-colonial duty from his ancestors. Payment of his filial debt to his father is equated with an affective debt to his homeland. Miranda Jr. inherits an abstract notion of affective debt for Puerto Rico, but one which is rooted in a neoliberal politics of representation rather than decolonization, which result in interventions that reinforce colonialism instead of fighting it. There is also a constant transposition between familial and national debts in Miranda's public declarations on the Puerto Rican debt crisis, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section. This generational shift from leaders of the anti-colonial Left to neoliberal bulwarks invokes the history of lettered elites and literature in Puerto Rico.

In *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico*, Juan Gelpí reads the canon of twentieth century literature as reproducing a paternalist rhetoric that infantilizes the nation under the framework of a patriarchal familial metaphor: "Es paternalista quien se ve como padre y coloca a otros miembros de la sociedad en una posición inferior de niños figurados. La retórica del paternalismo a menudo remite a las relaciones familiares, y su metáfora fundamental consiste en equiparar a la nación con una gran familia" (Gelpí 2). According to Gelpí, paternalism has ordered not just literary but cultural and political relations more broadly: the political order belongs to (cisgendered, white) men who recur to the metaphor of a family to subordinate the rest of the population and infantilize it.

The Mirandas' public performance of paterno-filial kinship is reminiscent of this patriarchal and paternalist order. Their engagement in debates surrounding policy decisions that would fundamentally alter Puerto Rico's future and colonial relationship to the US evokes a performance of paternalistic politics, where the trope of family is invoked to homogenize and dispel alternative narratives of the political possibilities for the island under the debt crisis. The father-son relationship also evokes indebtedness in another way: as a child of immigrants, Miranda may be regarded as a "debt-bound son," paying back the familial debt owed to his family—the narrative of migrant parent sacrifice for a better life—through the favor of shedding the spotlight in his father's political causes. Gelpí also notes the centrality of the concepts of genealogy and legacy (5) in the construction of a Puerto Rican literary canon and history. If we followed Gelpi's reading, the Mirandas' genealogy thus authorizes them their public discourse as legitimate.

Miranda's Indebted Docility

The peak of Hamilton's success in 2016 coincided with the announcement of Puerto Rico's imminent bankruptcy from $72 billion of debt. In June 2015, then Puerto Rico governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla announced that Puerto Rico's debt was mathematically unpayable and Puerto Rico would have to default (Corkery and Walsh). This was the beginning of a politically confusing long road for Puerto Rico which highlighted the colonial reality of the island. Because Puerto Rico is not a state of the US, it cannot file for bankruptcy. Because it is not a sovereign nation, it cannot recur to international mechanisms such as the IMF. The lack of options left Puerto Rico, that is to say, its colonial status, left it in a vulnerable and invisible geopolitical position. Miranda was vocal about Puerto Rico's plight, and used his public interventions in

media outlets to bring attention to the subject. The most visible and consequential of these interventions was an appearance in "Last Week Tonight," a weekly late-night show on HBO hosted by British comedian John Oliver. The show's format devotes long segments to in-depth explorations of issues—investigative journalism peppered with comedy. This episode was devoted almost in its entirety to Puerto Rico, providing context for the debt story and criticizing Congress for its inaction regarding Puerto Rico. After Oliver was done, he introduced a "surprise guest" and Miranda proceeded to perform a rap song about Puerto Rico's debt.

Miranda delivered an impassioned two-minute rap, with *Hamilton* co-writer and director Alex Lacamoire on the piano playing a soft salsa melody in the background. The song's opening lines: "Yo. My family's from/Puerto Rico. The tropical destination/Where you can spend your Washingtons, the spot where you vacation," (Miranda, "Last ") establish North Americans as the ideal and real audience by alluding to the trope of Caribbean tropical paradise in the imperial imaginary, emptying Puerto Rico of living subjects and its colonial history of being an island-resort for Americans' leisure consumption.

In the next stanza, Miranda acknowledges the colonial status of Puerto Rico: "A commonwealth with not a lot o' wealth, a not-quite nation" a status legally adopted through Puerto Rico's first constitution, ratified by the U.S. government in 1952, which states that Puerto Rico must pay back its debt to the US "before almost any other bills."[13] The song crescendos into a biting denunciation of federal Congressional inaction and of politicians who "crap" in the "soup bowls" of Puerto Ricans by neglecting to define a discernible debt/bankruptcy policy. Miranda blames the US government for Puerto Rico's current state of austerity and decay, citing

[13]"And under the island's Constitution, Puerto Rico was required to pay back its debt before almost any other bills, whether for retirees' health care or teachers' salaries." Mahler and Confessore.

"the Congress that got us into this situation," "suicidal tax incentives," and the primacy of debt payment over local infrastructure of Puerto Rico's colonial constitution: "yeah we'll pay your bonds first/close the hospitals/fuck the patients" ("Last"). Yet the disconnect between this critique and the "commonwealth" status alluded to in the previous lines shows Miranda's centrist-liberal critique, which fails to denounce the relationship between the island's colonial status and its debt. It continues:

> The great debate over statehood has to wait
>
> That's Rose and Jack on the Titanic askin', "When's our next date?"
>
> "The ship is sinking," we have to say, and pay shit that matters
>
> Then we'll figure out our Facebook relationship status
>
> "Will they or won't they?" It's Friends's Rachel and Ross
>
> We have to help our island just a hundred miles across ("Last").

In trying to separate the issue of status from that of debt, Miranda erases the coloniality of the debt itself—a debt historically created by over a century of US imperial policies in the Puerto Rican economy. The choice of *Titanic* and *Friends* metaphors render the status debate trivial in the eyes of Miranda, which undermines coloniality's fundamental role in debt creation. It's also a direct plea for debt payment, which belies the political nature of the intervention as one in favor of debt collection, which of course favors Wall Street over the people of Puerto Rico Miranda purports to help. Miranda continues, in a highly emotional affective register:

> The hard part is in convincing Congress
>
> that Puerto Rico matters
>
> so their heart is in
>
> The fight for relief

Not a bailout, just relief

A belief that you can pass legislation to ease our grief

Paul Ryan, I'll come sing Hamilton at your house

I'll do-si-do with Pelosi. I'll wear my Hamilton blouse! ("Last")

Miranda presents himself as colonial subject that is forced to beg for help, offering his services in exchange for not absolution, but "relief." In doing so, he embodies what Lazzarato has called "the indebted man." Lazzarato proposes that the creditor-debtor relation is the most important and universal power relation in modern-day capitalism, which has produced a "control of subjectivity—a particular form of *homo economicus*, the 'indebted man'" (30). He continues: "Debt produces a specific 'morality,' at once different from and complimentary to that of 'labor.' The couple 'effort-reward' of the ideology of work is doubled by the morality of the *promise* (to honor one's debt) and the *fault* (of having entered into it)" (Lazzarato 30). Miranda's performance embodies the guilt of being indebted. This guilt combines with the primal shame of colonization, following Frances Negrón Muntaner's assertion of "shame as constitutive of social identities generated by conflict within asymmetrical power relations" (xiii). This creates a new brand of colonized indebtedness. Miranda presents himself as colonial subject that is forced to beg for help, offering his services in exchange for not absolution, but "relief." This legitimizes the debt and centers Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans as culpable subjects. In 1962, Puerto Rican writer René Marqués infamously declared Puerto Ricans to be a docile people, via an eponymous essay. He was far from being the first to make this assertion but the essay's title, along with its claim, remain a widely held belief, perhaps a truism that continues to inform life in Puerto

Rico.[14] In the essay, Marqués crafted a mixture of psychoanalytical theory and literary interpretation to argue that Puerto Ricans were pathologically docile and submissive. I argue that these colonialist discourses and beliefs have all but intensified concomitantly with the strengthening of colonial rule in Puerto Rico as a result of the debt crisis.[15]

The trope of the docile Puerto Rican popularized by Rene Marqués during mid twentieth century resurfaces in the guise of its neoliberal indebted incarnation during the ominous plea for what will materialize as the PROMESA bill, the Fiscal Control Board, and thus a more explicit form of colonial governance. Rene Marqués' famous essay stated that we are still colonized because we are docile, pathologizing our colonial condition. I don't aim to pathologize further myself but argue that in Miranda's plea we see how this trope persists in the neoliberal guise of indebted subjectivity. Marqués' 'puertorriqueño dócil' morphs into Lazzarato's indebted man to produce the specific subjectivity of indebted docility. Towards the end, the affect in the song shifts from aggressive rap critique to emotional plea. Miranda's fast gesticulations throughout the song also shift from indignation into supplication, which sets the stage for the scenario of crisis, with him playing the title role of indebted yet benevolent subject. The public performance of rage turned supplication makes Miranda and, by virtue of his public performance for US audiences, Puerto Rico, into a docile indebted subject.

The song is the most intricate and visible, but far from the only, intervention by Miranda into Puerto Rico's debt crisis. Just days before, he had given a press conference in Washington D.C. joined by Democrat members of Congress such as Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

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[14] A great example of this was the trope of Puerto Ricans awakening from a long, deep sleep in the recent uprising of the Summer of 2019. This often repeated assumption implied the historical 'sleep' and thus pacifism or docility of the Puerto Rican people.

[15] I refer specifically to the imposition of a Fiscal Control Board in Puerto Rico as a result of the PROMESA Bill passed in US Congress, and to the Sánchez vs. Juarez ruling which recently confirmed Puerto Rico's lack of legal sovereignty.

Two weeks later, he published an opinion piece in *The New York Times* titled "Give Puerto Rico Its Chance to Thrive," where he also argued for Congressional action on the issue of the debt crisis. There is a series of other news interviews around the same dates where he speaks directly to the issue of the debt crisis, bringing up the same points.

In the editorial, Miranda opens with a reference to a hurricane in St. Croix, which Alexander Hamilton lived through, and frames his argument for help for Puerto Rican people via debt restructuring through Hamilton's past actions of pleading for aid in newspaper editorials. He quotes a letter written by Hamilton after said hurricane which is a call for compassion of the "affluent" towards the rest of "humanity," a plea to wealthy countries for aid for a small and downtrodden one (Miranda, "Give"). Miranda finds a parallel between the eighteenth-century hurricane woes of St. Croix and contemporary Puerto Rico, presumably because of the shared Caribbean geographical location and the persistent inequality and power differential between empires and their colonies. The Caribbean is once again invoked as a specter and the site of catastrophe, and Hamilton's plea serves as a model for Miranda's own. This is also yet another way in which the fictional world of the play is activated and fused with contemporary reality. It also illustrates the blurring between Hamilton and Miranda.

The piece goes on to paint a picture of downtrodden contemporary Puerto Rico under the debt crisis, echoing St. Croix's past natural disaster and in the process naturalizing the crisis. Camila Fojas has examined the ways the language of capitalism and specifically crisis capitalism are often described in the language of organic cycles and natural phenomena: "they apply the language of natural disaster to human-made phenomena, which suggests that crises are inevitable conditions to which we must adjust and acculturate" (Fojas 6). She cites economists who compare financial crises to storms specifically: 'Though crises are commonplace, they are also

creatures of habit. They're a bit like hurricanes: they operate in a relatively predictable fashion but can change directions, subside, and even spring back to life with little warning" (6). The invocation to hurricanes in economic language has two functions: on one hand it strips the crisis from human agency, by likening it to the inevitability of atmospheric events, and it suggests that both are phenomena of catastrophe, analogous in the intensity of the destruction they bring. Puerto Rico currently stands as a perfect case study for the combination of both phenomena, as the combination of its debt crisis with Hurricane Maria have made it an exemplary model of disaster capitalism. The fact that Miranda invoked the image and metaphor of the hurricane on his appeals to Congress in 2016, before Hurricane Maria, is not just foreboding but also, like the economists, a likening of the natural and man-made disasters they bring. He continues:

> Much has been said about the dire economic situation pressing down on Puerto Rico. I am the son of Puerto Rican parents. What can I say to persuade elected officials and policy makers to act? What influence do I have to change the minds and hearts of those in Congress to put aside their differences and deal with the crisis confronting 3.5 million American citizens in the Caribbean? I'm not a politician or an economist. I'm a storyteller.
>
> More than 150 schools on the island have closed. San Jorge Children's Hospital, Puerto Rico's largest pediatric hospital, has been forced to close two wings and 40 rooms, and cannot afford to hire the nurses it needs. It's estimated that a doctor a day leaves the island. Engineers, accountants, blue-collar workers and entire families are emigrating daily. According to the census, Puerto Rico has lost 9 percent of its population in the last decade, with 84,000 leaving last year alone (Miranda, "Give").

After establishing both his motivation and authority to intervene in the issue of the crisis, Miranda states his approach: he will narrate a story that puts a face on the language of debt crisis. He pleads Congress intervention by attempting to humanize what are otherwise cold mathematical facts ($72 billion debt) and imbuing it with pathos and translating it into a sense of personal and collective devastation. His story produces an imagery of loss and wreckage akin to that of a post-natural disaster scenario.

There are a series of tropes of conventions that become common to Miranda's public appearances and interventions. Hurricanes is one of them, and another important one is the banter to and with Congress members about exchanging Hamilton tickets—an almost impossible feat at the time—for legislation in Puerto Rico. In the press conference he held to lobby for debt restructuring, the script is similar to the HBO rap and the newspaper editorial: he asserts his authority by speaking about his parents and their background, he humanizes the situation by speaking about his childhood memories in Vega Alta, his family's hometown, and the way the crisis has left it a "dying town." In the four-minute speech, at some point he says: "I'm urging Congress—if Hamilton tickets help, I'm happy to do that too" to audience laughter and quips of interest" ("Lin-Manuel Miranda Calls on Congress for Puerto Rico Support"). The speech, otherwise sober, riles the audience only at this point, a perverse bit of humor that suggests that a sob story about the maladies of a people do not move Congress to action the way getting into a popular Broadway show would.

Hamilton *Arrives in San Juan*

The first foretelling of *Hamilton*'s run in the island was the controversy over its venue change. In November 2017, merely two months after Hurricane Maria, when most of the island

still lacked electricity, Miranda held a public event in the University of Puerto Rico to announce that he would be bringing Hamilton to Puerto Rico. His announcement was the closing leg of a trip to bring aid to the island in the face of the storm and announce the donations of his father's "Hispanic Federation" non-profit to local organizations. Miranda made the announcement on the theater stage of the University of Puerto Rico, pledging to donate the show's profits to the island as hurricane relief. During his announcement, a group of students staged a protest, carrying signs that read "Lin-Manuel: our lives are not your theater" ("Presidente") in reference to Miranda's aforementioned role in the passing of PROMESA law and its imposition of La Junta in Puerto Rico. The students called attention to the performative nature of Miranda's philanthropy and activism. The protest also illustrated the blurring between the staging of the play, the staging of Miranda's performative actions, and the material crisis underway on the island.[16]

Miranda's entire trip was mired in the conventions of performative disaster philanthropy: tweets, videos and press coverage of Miranda distributing food and supplies to locals abounded. The press statement that covered the announcement of the play's run in San Juan states:

> When I last visited the island, a few weeks before Hurricane Maria, I had made a commitment to not only bring the show to Puerto Rico, but also return again to the title role. In the aftermath of Maria we decided to expedite the announcement of the project to send a bold message that Puerto Rico will recover and be back in business, stronger than ever (McPhee).

The idea of post-hurricane Puerto Rico as a place 'open for business" will become a trope of post-hurricane relief, a way in which neoliberal recovery efforts use business jargon to equate the

[16] The protestors forced Miranda to reckon with his past endorsement of PROMESA, and he apologized to the crowd for not knowing what the consequences of his calls for debt restructuring would result in.

island with a private business, in a common trope of disaster capitalism. The announcement of a glitzy Broadway production as part of recovery efforts at a time when the disaster is yet unfolding erases the present-ness of the disaster. Recovery implies the disaster has ended, but accounts of Hurricane Maria "complicate […] linear timeline[s] of disaster and recovery and point[…] instead to natural disasters as cumulative and ongoing" rather than "singular events" (Bonilla and LeBrón, 2-3). The aesthetic register of a Broadway production also direly contrasts with material reality of (post)disaster, juxtaposing the precarity of Puerto Rican infrastructure with the glamour of US Broadway theater.

The play was announced to be performed in the theater of the University of Puerto Rico, and as the date came closer it was revealed that Miranda and the Hispanic Federation had invested millions on the rebuilding of the historic theater, destroyed by the storm. UPR's theater is a historically charged space, as is the University of Puerto Rico. Founded in 1903 after U.S. colonization in 1898 as a school for the training of teachers which were to acculturate students into US culture, it evolved into a premier higher education institution of Latin America and the Caribbean, an engine of social mobility for Puerto Rico's working-class population, and a hotbed of political dissent, radical ideas and Puerto Rican independence.[17] To this day UPR remains the center of political mobilization and dissent on the island for issues inside and that transcend the university, such as Puerto Rican independence, labor rights, and most recently, the debt crisis and austerity measures, of which UPR has been a primary target.[18] UPR is thus a highly politicized space, and the decision to stage *Hamilton* there would prove inextricable from such

[17] For more details and nuance on the central role of UPR in Puerto Rican political struggle, see Jirau Arroyo.
[18] The students at the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras have declared student strikes twice since the establishment of La Junta, in 2017 and 2021. These strikes are remarkable in that, unlike most previous strikes in UPR history, they do not demand the stop of tuition hikes, but rather against La Junta and austerity measures that have cut UPR's budget by over 50%.

politics, to the extent of making the decision untenable and ultimately holding the show in a different venue.

Despite the fact that *Hamilton* has been extremely politicized in the context of US politics, its production team hoped to depoliticize UPR and its theater for their run. It did not work: on November 28, 2018, just two months before the play was set to premiere, the staff union of UPR employees sent a public letter to Miranda stating that his play might be caught within the conflict of their contract negotiations with UPR administration. While the HEEND (the employees' union) cited their contract as the issue at hand, they framed that negotiation under the broader economic debt crisis and explicitly referenced the imposition of la Junta and its attack on UPR as diminishing their rights as workers and limiting access to the university for future students. They referred to UPR's retirement benefits insecurity and the elimination of scholarships for the children of staff.[19] The letter frames their specific struggle—an impasse in contract negotiations with university administration is inextricable from the larger forms of austerity brought on by la Junta, which Miranda actively lobbied for in 2016. As such, the letter not only uses the importance of Hamilton's production as leverage with university administration, but also suggests Miranda's own complicity with the structural forces that burden the union's working conditions. In any case, the letter is the first confrontation of the show with the reality of crisis facing the island, a text that ruptures the fictional scenario of the play with the crisis scenario on the ground in Puerto Rico.

Shortly after, the union 'clarified' that their letter was not threatening the *Hamilton* production but rather the university administration and stated they would not try to stop the show

[19] See "La HEEND advierte que la presentación de "Hamilton" en la UPR podría afectarse" and *Pulso estudiantil*, "La HEEND envió una carta a Lin Manuel Miranda advirtiéndole sobre la situación actual de la UPR y "de la posibilidad que surja un conflicto" que afecte la presentación de la obra "Hamilton." *Twitter*.

from going on. One may surmise that this may have been the result of conversations between the production and the union, and perhaps the union may have been 'talked out' of any political action they may have been planning during the play. When the change of venue was announced, it was clear that the union's letter was not the culprit of the change. Rather, the sheer interruption of contemporary Puerto Rican politics into the imaginary of the play had caused it.

The official reason cited for the change of venue was security. In an interview with CBS the day before the premiere, Miranda's father, managing the press, remarked that though security threats might be "remote," the relocation decision was made by the production team for the safety of the cast and crew. Interviewer David Begnaud, himself a main actor of the crisis scenario as the benevolent US journalist who 'discovers' Puerto Rico and its crisis in the aftermath of the Hurricane, and a close friend of the Mirandas, cites the crisis as the context of the security concerns and brings up previous protests against Lin-Manuel for his support to PROMESA at UPR. They both stress the fact that the show cannot afford to suffer from an interruption, despite the fact that the show's story narrates and celebrates a political interruption—the US Revolution, and other interruptions, such as the New York casts' speech to Vice-President Mike Pence[20] in November 2016, were received with good publicity. In the interview, Miranda states that "Puerto Ricans like to protest," challenging the trope of Puerto Rican docility and shifting focus from the generalized state of crisis Begnaud points to. ("Hamilton Gets Ready") The public reasoning for the change of venue minimized the crisis and instead cited that Puerto Ricans are given to protest. It also dismissed the validity of protests and the politization of the show. Instead, Miranda shifts the conversation to a visiting contingent of

[20] On the night of November 18, 2016, the cast of the New York production of the show read a prepared statement after the show addressed to Mike Pence, who had recently been elected Vice-President, calling out his bigoted values and asking him to work for "all Americans," in one of the show's most blatant involvements with politics. See "'Hamilton' Had Some Unscripted Lines for Pence. Trump Wasn't Happy" in *The New York Times*.

thirty-something Congress people as something Puerto Ricans look forward to, referring to the Latino Democratic caucus, which Miranda is a consultant for.[21] The people's sense of discontent is rendered invisible, and instead the crisis becomes a backdrop of ruin for US politicians to survey.

Six months later, a private messaging thread between ousted Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rosselló and his closest aides was made public and revealed widespread corruption, misogyny, racism, and an utter lack of governance which included references to Hamilton and its venue change.[22] In the chat—a nine-hundred-page monument to toxic masculinity and disdain for Puerto Ricans—the governor and his friends made fun of the venue change and took credit for it. One of the chat participants, Elias Sánchez Sifonte, was Rosselló's campaign manager and a lobbyist for the insurance company that profited from the venue change (De Jesús Salamán). Even if Rosselló did not single-handedly cause the venue change, he and his people definitely profited from it. The chat admission thus confirmed the way *Hamilton* was used by the local Puerto Rican government for disaster profiteering, all the while simultaneously the show engaged in philanthropic disaster capitalism during its Puerto Rico run.

The venue change was also highly symptomatic of larger trends in the crisis in Puerto Rico. In terms of artistry, the UPR theater is historically one the islands' most important arts venues. Founded in 1939, it has for decades served as the center of performing arts. El Centro de Bellas Artes, on the other hand, was founded during the right-wing, pro-statehood government of Carlos Romeró Barceló, and named for another founding member of the Statehood Party, Luis

[21] For more on the connections between the Mirandas, the Democratic Party, and the production in Puerto Rico, see Serrano.

[22] The leaked chat was the main catalyst of two weeks of constant protests that paralyzed Puerto Rico and successfully ousted the governor. For more on these events, see LeBrón, Marisol, *Against Muerto Rico: Lessons from the Verano Boricua*.

A. Ferré, after a campaign to name it after Afro-Puerto Rican salsa great Ismael Rivera failed (Flores). Though located in Santurce, a once-vibrant neighborhood populated with marrons, liberated slaves and working-class migrants from across the islands which has suffered deep disinvestment from the crisis and is currently being gentrified, the venue has always symbolized the conservative arts elite. As such, the venue change—and thus Miranda and *Hamilton*—aid the gentrification of Santurce and the securitization state of Ricardo Rosselló. The "punitive governance" of Ricardo Rosseelló dates back to his father Pedro Rosselló's 'mano dura' policies in the 1990s, which, in combination with wide privatization and tax credits, marked the onset of the neoliberal era for Puerto Rico. As Marisol LeBrón states: "the Puerto Rican state has strengthened its security apparatus in an attempt to manage a range of social, economic, and political crises stemming from its continued incorporation into the United States as a commonwealth territory" (*Policing Life and Death* 4).

In Puerto Rico, the show was received with wide enthusiasm. The premiere was a national event, and the weeks leading up to it received non-stop media coverage. Despite the association with PROMESA and the confrontation at UPR, Miranda continued to be a symbol of national pride for many Puerto Ricans. For the show's production and the local government—who worked together— the arrival of the production of *Hamilton* to Puerto Rican soil was perceived as an opportunity to showcase[23] the islands to a US American and international audience. For many Puerto Ricans on the ground, the bubbling excitement of international attention was a welcome distraction from the dreariness of the islands' many crises.

[23] The term showcase was used in the media around these events, and it evokes the mid-twentieth century strategy that made Puerto Rico the showcase of the Caribbean,' referring to the capitalist outpost and contrast with communist Cuba in the context of the Cold War.

The accompanying media campaigns framed the homecoming as Puerto Rico's 'reopening' after the disaster of Hurricane Maria. Yet 'recovery' was far from over—or even beginning—as zero US federal dollars were approved for reconstruction at the time of the production. The 'open for business' catchphrase used on the national late night show *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* as he recorded a show from San Juan highlighted the neoliberal nature of the enterprise: an invitation for US investors and tourists to, in the words of Miranda "come and spend [their] Washingtons" (Elber). This campaign followed the visitor economy model, where the Puerto Rican economy is measured by its tourism industry for US Americans, despite the fact that tourism currently accounts for only six percent of economic revenue. The visitor economy model is premised on the notion of "transforming society to serve the visitor" which, in the tradition of colonialism, neglects the needs and sustainability of the local community at the service of a "spectacle" of nationality that pleases the visitor's gaze (Reyes Franco).

A tourism agency offered deals called "Join the Revolution Package," which included privileged seats to the show, a private tour of Miranda's hometown of Vega Baja, and a private mixology class and Bacardi distillery tour for three thousand dollars apiece ("Comité"). These tickets obviously targeted visitors, with a price designed for wealthy US tourists, not Puerto Rican locals. Thirty-six Democrat lawmakers held conventions for the Latino Victory Fund and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, blurring the line between a tropical Caribbean getaway and post-Hurricane philanthropy (Bernal). The conventions followed the same logic and rhetoric as the media and tourism strategies. The trip was supposed to expose the US lawmakers to the lack of recovery and therefore need for Congressional action on Puerto Rico, while also providing a weekend getaway and tickets to the show.

On the show's opening night, US celebrities, local elites, Democrat lawmakers, and local politicians mingled in the audience. Even the Clintons, other architects of the neoliberal 1990s and whose foundation profited off disaster capitalism in post-earthquake Haiti (Kushner), were seen posing with the Mirandas, in an unnerving foreshadowing of what was yet to come for Puerto Rico. After the setback presented by the venue change, the show's premiere was set for the birth date of Alexander Hamilton. As such, the date marked a multi-layered homecoming for Miranda, his father, and Hamilton as diasporic subjects returning to the homeland. This is yet another example of the way the Mirandas framed their intervention as one rooted in a genealogical patriarchal lettered tradition. The atmosphere was festive on the Bellas Artes terrace, once you passed the heavy police presence. The soundtrack to Hamilton played in the background, along with occasional popular salsa and merengue songs. A Black woman sold snacks and party favors on the steps to the entrance. Young employees advertised different companies with merchandise and selfie requests. Beer and snacks kiosks with banners for the local beer, *Medalla*, seated elegantly dressed locals and US Americans. The protest referenced at the beginning of this chapter received a lot of media attention, and other fans not associated with the protest, mostly white US Americans, purportedly, also sported colonial garb as they stood in line. Opening night on the ground more resembled a Caribbean street festival than it did Broadway, but it was also clear this was a festival entangled in global financial capitalism.

Colonial Affect and Puerto Rican Fandom

Miranda's and the musical's Puerto Rican fandom was huge. Ticket prices were higher than for most local theater productions, ranging from one hundred to one thousand dollars. This did not dwindle fans' enthusiasm, and groups of fans consisted of US Americans who

pilgrimaged to the Miranda's homeland betting on a special experience, many of whom had travelled across US cities and even the globe to watch different iterations of the play.[24] A special performance for Puerto Rican college students caused hundreds to stand in lines for over sixteen hours to try to secure a ticket. In 2019, such lines evoked the long lines Puerto Ricans made after Hurricane Maria to secure water and food. Yet the mood of this line was festive; students planned to spend the night camping out with peers, listening to *Hamilton* songs and reggaeton. I interviewed some of these students to try to understand the process of their affective engagements with the play and with Miranda. Celebrity fandom often espouses similar characteristics: unbridled devotion, an excess of time, quasi-godlike infatuation and hagioification of stars. But in the context of political turmoil and controversy, of a traumatizing economic and natural disaster-what drew these people to *Hamilton?*

The many critiques that can be made of *Hamilton* have not diminished its popularity—and there are legions of loyal fans in Latinx communities in the US, as well as in Puerto Rico. The ideological tensions that surround it have not quelled the devoted enthusiasm of its many fans. In fact, dissenting with *Hamilton*'s ideas has been controversial for critics because it is perceived as 'ruining the fun' of what is considered harmless, feel-good entertainment, what Frances Aparicio calls "mixing deconstruction with dancing" (xi). Its racial revisionism has resulted in the creation of strong affective ties by many people of color, though enthusiasm for the play is not restricted to audiences of color, of course. After offering a critique of the ideological entanglements of *Hamilton,* I find it important to also grapple with the intensity of affective engagements the play holds. To do so, I focus on the perspective of audiences,

[24] I interviewed two female fans from the US who had seen the show seventeen times, in New York, Florida, Ohio, and London, among other destinations. They were dressed head to toe in Hamilton merchandise and I spotted them on the theater's terrace every day of the opening weekend.

following Jillian Báez's study of the role of audiences in popular media, specifically her contention that Latina/o audiences are active producers of meaning in the media they consume. How do colonial subjects in the midst of a traumatizing and slow yet relentless collapse of political, economic, and social infrastructures relate to *Hamilton*, its plot of colonization and independence, its celebration of the virtues of their present colonial power? I believe that Puerto Ricans simultaneously struggled with, disidentified from, and resignified the messages of *Hamilton*. In *In Search of Belonging: Latinas, Media, and Citizenship* (2018), Báez reminds us that [Latina] audiences should not be "viewed as dupes or victims, but indeed as capable of producing their own meaning-making through their knowledge of social hierarchies and power relations from lived experiences" (16). I started listening to the Hamilton soundtrack in Puerto Rico in 2015, without economic or logistical access to see the play, and I consumed *Hamilton*-related media. I was caught up in the music's catchiness and taken by the plot's ability to turn the driest of topics—early colonial US history—into a gripping story. The first Act's narration of the events leading up to the American Revolution and its series of arguments against colonialism were especially riveting to me. As I learned about and admired Miranda, I was convinced Puerto Rico's struggle for independence *must* have inspired lyrics such as 'are we a nation of states/what's the state of our nation,' reflected in the banners with this and other lyrics in the pro-statehood protest in Bellas Artes I previously discussed. An important part of my affective engagement with the play came from this fact, as I admired what I thought was a witty nudge towards Puerto Rican decolonization slyly placed in the drama of the belly of the beast. As the events regarding Miranda's position towards the PROMESA bill unfolded, I concluded that this was probably not true, and felt disappointed and duped. However, the artists' intentions were ultimately irrelevant to the meaning they produced for me, and I negotiated with and resignified

the original context—the drama of US empire, which I resent—to make the lyrics about my own desire for decolonization, which at least partially mediated and motivated the pleasure I got from listening. As events continued to unfold, it became impossible for me to find pleasure in the play, as my anger grew bigger. I don't aim to make this a homogenous story of Puerto Rican engagement with *Hamilton*, of course, but offer it as a distinct example of how audiences can negotiate and resignify meanings.

While in Puerto Rico for the premiere of the play, I asked people I knew and casually interviewed about what drew them to it. My conversations were not structured participant interviews but do have ethnographic value, so I share observations I gleaned from them. A friend said that while she was unfamiliar with the story, she admired Miranda's talent and felt pride from his achievements, and this resulted in a kind of noncommittal enthusiasm to have the production in Puerto Rico. The range of responses from fans went from some who did not know enough English to understand the plot, but said they enjoyed the music and Miranda, to others who were not aware or interested in the political context that surrounded the play and enjoyed it for its strong storytelling, because they were fans of musicals broadly, to others that showed slight discomfort with Miranda's advocacy but continued to enjoy the contents of the play. These responses illustrate the diversity of engagement tactics that Báez outlines which range from acceptance to negotiation, resignification, and, I add, disidentification with the ideological implications of *Hamilton*. Puerto Ricans largely identified with Miranda because he was vocal about his Puerto Rican identity, and he was perceived and portrayed as a source of national pride. As Duany, Pabón, and Dávila have discussed, cultural nationalism is a central tenet of Puerto Rican nationhood, as it becomes the main or only outlet for the expression of autonomy in the face of the colonial lack of political sovereignty. Because of this, there is a long history of strong

Puerto Rican affection with sports figures and celebrities that come to 'represent' the nation and serve as proxies of political autonomy, as their fame brings positive international recognition to the islands. Diasporic and Black Olympic medalist Jasmin Oquendo is the most recent example in a long line of athletes, beauty pageant queens, musicians, and other celebrities that are unofficially doted with being representatives of Puerto Rican pride and cultural nationalism. The topic of the musical may have been estranging to Puerto Rican audiences, but the glory Miranda brings to Puerto Rico may be strong enough to overcome that. Others, like the statehood supporters who protested on opening night, also interpreted the lyrics as a reflection of the need for Puerto Rican decolonization. In her book, Báez tells us that "audiences' interactions with mainstream and ethnic media were very much about assessing their location within the U.S. imaginary" (3). While I cannot provide an exhaustive study of audience engagement, it is safe to conclude that Puerto Ricans had to grapple with their colonial experience in their engagement with *Hamilton*, illustrated by those who cannot linguistically access its content to those who accept a dominant interpretation, those who negotiate through it, resignify it, or disidentify from this content in order to allow themselves the pleasure of spectatorship. As such, the experience of the Puerto Rican spectator is mediated by a sort of colonial affect.

The distinction between Anglo and Puerto Rican audiences is fundamental. During the play's opening, white North American fans dressed in colonial garb or *Hamilton* merchandise stood out, as these US fans needed the economic mobility to travel to Puerto Rico and pay the expensive ticket, lodging, and other expenses. I spoke to at least six different people who had travelled to Puerto Rico to see the play after having seen it in multiple cities in the US and even Europe. One of these people was a Latina lawyer from Miami, who had travelled to Puerto Rico exclusively to see the show after having seen it in New York, and who planned on attending at

least two different functions on the same weekend. I highlight the demographic differences to show the wide range of affective engagement that *Hamilton* produced across age, race, class, and ethnicity, and gender. But it is important to account how all these variables impact people's relationship to the play, especially in light of the noted assertion from Báez. I am specifically interested in how Puerto Ricans, across ages and generations, the racial and class spectrum, from the islands and the continental US, relate to *Hamilton*.

My critique of Miranda focuses on structural issues bigger than any individual. It is precisely the deep entrenchment of colonialism and the coloniality of power which puts Miranda in the position of begging the imperial Congress for action. If anything, the tensions in his intervention speak to the outsized role of celebrity activism in neoliberal times: where the weight of structural political responsibilities is shifted onto individual citizens. His philanthropic efforts on the island are evidence of this: he is probably the main source of funding of Puerto Rican arts today, replacing the almost-defunct state-sponsored Instituto de Cultura. Products of mass popular culture do have an immense power to shape the dominating discourses around the issues they approach. My critique does not aim to destroy people's complicated and intense affective engagements with a work, but rather to show how these affective structures are not isolated from the political realities they're produced in. In the case of the play that means layers upon layers of colonial domination, in the case of Miranda's activism for debt relief, the horizon of possibility for Puerto Rico's future.

'SHAME ON YOU': The Scenario of La Junta

The peak of Hamilton's success coincided with the establishment of La Junta, the US-government appointed Fiscal Control Board charged with "overseeing" Puerto Rican finances to

ensure debt collection. This appointment was a crucial moment for Puerto Rico: the veneer of self-governance provided by the Estado Libre Asociado came off. Seven undemocratically elected financiers would have the power to overturn local Puerto Rican rulings in the interest of collecting debt repayments. Fiscal boards are common practice for bankrupted cities, but the colonial reality of Puerto Rico means the Junta is a form of colonial governance. In the short essay "Shame On You," Puerto Rican author Beatriz Llenín Figueroa reflects on the impact of this moment for Puerto Ricans. For Llenín Figueroa, narrating the moment of la Junta's imposition is an example of reality exceeding and overtaking fiction. In a close analysis of the live video transmission of the official convening of the control board, she unpacks the incredulity and horror of witnessing this new reality. This narration situates the establishment of the Fiscal Control Board as a crucial, epochal, watershed moment in the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico. It reads the event as a performance: a staged ritual of colonialism witnessed in real time, confounding temporality itself.

> En 2016, el líder en ascos puso en marcha, con la "transparencia" de una transmisión de vídeo y el cobijo legalizado de una "PROMESA," la "Junta de Supervisión Fiscal." El gusano de hielo asoma sus siete cabezas. No hay décadas que esperar. El apocalipsis es siempre un recuerdo del porvenir para las condenadas de la tierra (49).

The passage highlights the 'liveness' of the event and thus its present-ness, a nudge towards witnessing the horror of colonialism—often, and especially throughout *Hamilton*, perceived as a relic of the past. It also mentions the legality of the colonial horror: a bill signed into law, presented as 'help.' The last phrase insists on the distorted games of temporality at play: the apocalyptic horror of a colonial decree is becomes a 'memory of the future,' suggesting both that such horror is cognitively incongruent with the 'liveness' of the present, that it is a repetition, not

new, because the colonial subject has already experienced it through past horrors, and that the future is no different from the colonial horror of the past to the wretched of the Earth. With this last phrase Llenín Figueroa invokes Fanon's famous treatise of colonial horror, but modifies the gender to female to account for her own positionality and highlight the gendered effects of colonialism. When describing the live video transmission she watches, Llenín Figueroa continues:

> Mono-tonales, con mafafos en las bocas repletas de saliva ensangrentada, monocromáticos sus vestuarios, estudiados y mínimos sus movimientos y sus gestos. Así habla y así se ve un profesional, un experto, un mesías. Hasta se recuerdan unos a otros: fulano, ¿no es cierto que quieres comentar algo ahora? Porque está en el libreto, claro, que en nuestra propia cara pasan, página a página, toditos a la vez como en una coreografía del horror (50).

The horror imagery of "bocas repletas de saliva ensangrentada" highlights the gore capitalism (Valencia) of financial oppression that is veiled under the perceived neutrality and respectability of their monochromatic costumes. Llenín Figueroa notes the theatrical farce of the staged event transmission, which highlights its performativity. Here I use the term in its sense as performance act following Austin's theorization of speech act. The terms used in the last sentence: 'libreto' and 'coreografía' invoke the theatrical character, adding a layer to the performance of authority and legality of the event, also conveying a farcical theater of financial/legal authority that veils what she quotes them openly calling a "broad *capture* of public entities" (50, emphasis mine). Rocio Zambrana has discussed/described debt as an apparatus of capture (*Colonial Debts*). "Y con ese *speech act* y las manos arriba de siete tipos se nos disuelve la vida" (50, emphasis in the original). Here Llenín Figueroa invokes the speech act, the fundamental pillar of performance

theory, which is defined as acts whose repetition grants them a ritualized social authority, also called a performative. “Performatives are, for Austin, transforming action statements, such as the discourse that accompanies a baptism or a wedding ceremony” (Prieto Stambaugh 248). The statement reveals the contrast between the mundanity of the ritual for its performers, the seven members of la Junta, and its life-altering, dramatic consequences for the over three million residents of the islands.

The rhetoric Llenín Figueroa uses turns the banality of a business meeting into a spectacle of colonial horror. Its framing as a performance unmasks the neutrality of the transaction, reflecting on the outsized consequences of a perceived mundane and quick governmental errand. In so doing, she insists on the visibility and documentation of a crucial shift in Puerto Rico’s colonial history, which was mostly not perceived as such because of its financialized disguise. The rhetorical maneuver of unveiling the performativity of this event brings us back to Taylor’s scenario of crisis. It highlights both the farcical theatralization of colonial violence and the performative enactment of the scenario of crisis to justify austerity’s plundering of resources. She continues: “LOS LIBRETOS SE MEMORIZAN Y SE DEJAN FUERA DE ESCENA PARA QUE PAREZCA COMO SI NO HUBIERA LIBRETO” (50, capitalization in the original). Insisting on the scripted nature of the meeting, Llenín Figueroa reveals the farce of neutrality of a group of people (la Junta) who know their objective to be colonial violence. But with the wordplay of scene, script, and memorization, she calls attention to the performative and staged ritualization of the scenario of crisis that is at play with the meeting. If *Hamilton* dramatizes the crisis of colonialism and subsequent nation-building for the United States, Llenín Figueroa’s reading dramatizes a response from Puerto Rico’s current crisis scenario, showing how present colonial conditions persist. The rhetorically loaded short text also

carries throughout an intense affect of rage which, as I will show in the next chapter, is a dominant affective response in feminist poetry of indebtedness.

Chapter II: 'Sacar del closet a la deuda': Feminist Decolonial Debt Refusals

"Hay una deuda
pero está rota
y es inútil pagarla en pedacitos."
-Mara Pastor, *Falsa heladería*

The epigraph above, from Mara Pastor's poem "Hay una deuda," which I will analyze in detail below, is a poetic theorization on the logic of colonial debt relations. It raises the question: 'who really owes what to whom?' that titles this dissertation. An indictment of the conditions of debt we take for granted, the poem challenges the nature of indebtedness and explores the relationship between economic and moral obligations. The epigraph is the poem's title and opening two lines, which announce the weight of the debt, its outsized and overwhelming presence in the Puerto Rican consciousness. The second line, however, challenges this weight by acknowledging the debt is 'broken:' corrupt, odious[25], illegitimate, unpayable. The last line of the stanza concludes that thus attempting to pay back is a futile exercise. These three lines (and the rest of the poem) gesture towards an understanding of the coloniality of debt.

[25] Legal scholar Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan has argued that Puerto Rico's debt is odious, a legal classification for "examining the debt's morality and fairness" which "recognizes that there are illegitimate debts that originate from either odious borrowing or odious lending practices." (Ora Bannan 225) After reviewing the tenets of this doctrine, Ora Bannan concludes: "Puerto Rico's debt must be declared odious, because there is nothing more odious than being a colony. A fundamental principle of the odious debt doctrine is that the political context in which debt arises is a crucial factor in determining its legitimacy." (231) There is a difference between the argument of legal illegitimacy Ora Bannan and other legal scholars make and the coloniality of debt argument I made in this dissertation (following Rocío Zambrana's work), but they do not cancel each other—the odious debt argument offers yet another framework to understand why the debt does not stand.

In the first chapter, I discussed Lin-Manuel Miranda and his play *Hamilton: An American Musical*'s roles in the Puerto Rican debt crisis, examining the way Miranda embodied the docile indebted subject. In this chapter, I read contemporary feminist poetry that refuses indebted subjectivity, instead theorizing about the affective and embodied experiences of being indebted, refusing its culpability, and articulating decolonial futures. I argue that the poetry and essays of the five authors: Raquel Salas Rivera, Mara Pastor, Nicole Delgado, Ariadna Godreau Aubert, and Pedro Pietri share a distinctively feminist and/or decolonial approach towards indebtedness, and that their writings are theorizations that help us understand not only the phenomenon of debt itself but also its material and affective consequences on contemporary Puerto Rico. In so doing, they create a feminist and decolonial poetics that subverts indebtedness and the coloniality of power in Puerto Rico. Following Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez, I believe that "the role and subjective position of women, girls, femmes, and queer colonized subjects are often relegated to liminal spaces when discussing the violence endemic to colonialism and coloniality" (33) and "[Black][26] femmes in Caribbean diasporic and Afro-Hispanic contexts produce forms of liberation through bodily acts that resist the corporeal and epistemological enclosures of coloniality" (35). As such, I follow Figueroa-Vásquez's "'decolonial queer femme' method [that] valorizes nonnormative embodied femininity as source[s] of knowing and perceiving" (33).

I propose that queer, feminist, and decolonial aesthetics are a central site of knowledge production to reckon with and resist indebtedness as the governing logic in Puerto Rican politics. These works produce knowledge about indebtedness that counters traditional forms of discourse

[26] The poets I examine in this chapter are not Black, but they share a feminist embodied colonial experience with the works discussed by Figueroa-Vásquez. Towards the end of this chapter, I include a discussion on the racial and class positionalities of the authors I write about.

on debt like policy, law, and economics. I argue that the feminist and/or queer positionality of the authors—Pastor, Delgado, and Godreau Aubert are cisgender women, Salas Rivera is a transgender masculine nonbinary person, and Pietri is an Afro-Puerto Rican diasporic subject — is fundamental to their position on debt. Ultimately, I argue that a decolonial critique of debt is rooted in queer and feminist thinking: the perspectives of queer and feminist people make for the most radical critique of debt. The poems and essay examined here make five distinct but interconnected main arguments. First, that debt is a violent social relation based on hierarchy and inequality. Second, that debt is inherently colonial and the contemporary expression of the coloniality of power. Third, that the repayment of debt is premised on a logic of guilt and obedience that is both colonial and historically feminized. Fourth, that for these reasons, refusing debt repayment is a form of decolonial and feminist resistance. Fifth, these poems theorize debt and crisis from a feminist and affective standpoint, and in so doing they articulate a definition of decoloniality based on praxis and in quotidian action and community rather than coming from political aspiration.

The landscape of crisis: Periodo especial, Falsa heladería, *and* Lo terciario

Published between 2018 and 2019, these three poetry volumes express the fatigue of a Puerto Rico going on two decades under economic crisis, a crisis that had its climax under Hurricane Maria in 2017. The crisis is present through descriptions of the landscape, sociality, and affects of rage and fatigue. When it's not explicitly named, it still serves as the "political unconscious" (Jameson) that underwrites the works. Most importantly, each book articulates visions of everyday decolonial praxis rooted in feminist community and in ecopoetics as a response.

Nicole Cecilia Delgado's *Periodo especial* (2019) is a searing collection of poetry written in the aftermath of the compounding crises of debt and Hurricane Maria, and all the resulting disasters these unleashed. Its poems are filled with alternating rage, heartbreak, exhaustion, bewilderment, apathy, hope, and humor. Like her earlier work, these poems are grounded in a feminist consciousness expressed in a sparse and 'confessional' poetic voice that moves slowly but sharply through the crises' rubble. The book is divided into four sections that tackle topics familiar in Delgado's work: migration and exile ("Los aviones"), Puerto Rican colonial politics ("Trampas al sistema"), archipelagic Caribbean subjectivity ("Islas adyacentes"), and life after the hurricane ("Huracán que no viene.") The opening section, "Los aviones", contemplates the hesitant return to an island already in crisis and laments the exilic condition that has expulsed not just the poetic subject individually but generations of Puerto Ricans due to the crisis. The book's opening line: "He visto/las grandes mentes de mi generación irse a la mierda./Te lo confieso mientras busco pasajes baratos por internet" (Delgado, *Periodo* 25) rewrites Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (the poem's title is "Un poema beatnik"), replacing Ginsberg's Beat pessimism about mainstream conservative US society with the colonial expulsion politics that have displaced entire generations from life on the islands. "Irse a la mierda" more likely suggests waste than movement, replacing the original "destroyed by madness" with vernacular and scatological precision. The line that follows ("Te lo confieso mientras busco pasajes baratos por internet") brings up migration as either cause or consequence of the waste/destruction of minds. It is not clear whether the poem's speaker speaks from Puerto Rico or from exile but in either case, the line illustrates a yearning for Puerto Rico despite its crisis, or the pained need for exile from it. The following poem, "Uno de agricultura," imagines a future in Puerto Rico with the use of the

conditional “si,” a utopian agricultural landscape—utopian only because the colonial circumstances hinder local agricultural sustainability:

> Hasta podría regresar a la isla
> si en una casa en el campo en el oeste
> se puede sembrar sosiego y buena voluntad
> acerola y maíz, lechuga y gandules,
> si hay un árbol de mangó y otro de limón y otro de aguacate
> si las papayas vuelven a dar semilla,
> si es posible compartir
> los alimentos (26).

The poem’s start with “hasta” (“even”) suggests the perceived risk or recklessness of the decision to return to the islands amidst the crisis. The imagery of the poem evokes the early twentieth century romantization of rural lifestyle— Delgado has always taken up pastoral themes in her work. Yet in the context of the book, expressing desire for rural abundance is a form of resistance against the ways austerity and colonialism strip life from fresh foods and overall plenty. The poem’s list of conditions for return are a mixture of fruit and vegetables (“acerola y maíz, lechuga y gandules”) and values that are opposed to those of neoliberal austerity: “sosiego, buena voluntad y compartir.” This desire to ‘return’ to the natural land and its ways of life appears frequently throughout the volume (this poem is followed by one titled “Lamento borincano”) and is also a trope of migration literature in Puerto Rico throughout the twentieth century. Yet Delgado’s use of such tropes is decidedly political, feminist, and tied to the contemporary moment: what she articulates is a vision and a praxis of life outside indebted colonial capitalism. The Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) and Operation Bootstrap were tasked

with a violent, rapid transformation of Puerto Ricans' way of life, forcing internal migration from countryside to cities, replacing green with a crowded concrete landscape, and changing the food habits from self-reliant local foodstuffs to imported, packaged consumer goods. Delgado's poetry recuperates the language and visuality of the countryside, and in doing so activates a sense of nostalgia that signals towards utopian futures rather than romanticizing the past. It also highlights the failures of the modernization process and offers an alternative for a future that is centered around these values from a radical practice of feminist sustenance and care.

The book's second section, "Trampas al sistema", revises the history of ELA in poems like "La historia de Puerto Rico," (38) "Ancestros," (43) "Omisiones históricas," (44) "Medicina puertorriqueña," (49) and "Educación electoral/sufragio femenino" (55). These present a decolonial revision of official Puerto Rican narratives that starts by naming US colonialism and recuperating indigenous presence and connection to other indigenous and archipelagic decolonial histories. They also name the presence of armed struggle that is censored from official histories, and are in dialogue with a lineage of anti-colonial feminist poets from the 'generación del setenta' (for example Marigloria Palma, who appears in the book's epigraph with the verse: "Esta mañana, una amiga que estimo/vino a verme;/va a comprarse un revolver").

La historia de Puerto Rico
tiene
gringos invasores
indígenas fugados a la Península de Yucatán
grupos clandestinos y armados
explosivos, mujeres poetas que nadie lee (38).

The poem's rendition of past events becomes a sort of decolonial historiography, countering what Michel Rolph Truillot has termed "the silencing of historical archives" (Truillot 3). In "Educación electoral/sufragio femenino," the poem's speaker reflects on their grandmother's support for ELA and Luis Muñoz Marín and the intergenerational entanglement of this support with the family and national history: "Y ella, Abuela, que nunca tuvo que irse del país/ni ceder su vientre a los experimentos" (56). It creates a feminist genealogy that goes from the purported 'glory days' of ELA that gave the speaker's grandmother shoes for the first time to the dark history of medical experimentation with Puerto Rican women for US contraceptive development in the 1950s and 1960s to the current emptying of the islands due to the crisis. This rendering of feminist Puerto Rican history reveals the multigenerational spoils of colonialism.

"Islas adyacentes," the third section, moves its gaze from the islands of Puerto Rico to the neighboring Caribbean islands. Urayoán Noel has noted that Delgado's poetry is "invested in experimental and gendered project[s] of remapping" and "complicat[ing] the archipelagic as variously theorized by Benítez-Rojo, Glissant, and Martínez-San Miguel" (Noel, "*Islote* poetics" 213). This is perhaps the most hopeful section of the book, where the registers of rage and exhaustion shifts into the possibilities of Caribbean community. In "Identidad," (75) a desire to connect with maritime depths as an escape from earthly barbarism shows yet another instance of ecopoetry invested in the natural world as refuge from political catastrophe:

> Enajenación aislante de las profundidades marinas.
>
> El otro mundo mojándote las venas.
>
> Los continentes son la guerra y son la sangre.
>
> Y las islas, qué son las islas.
>
> Enfermedad tropical y caldo de cultivo.

Para ser un país hay que tener fronteras.

Pero eso NUNCA (Delgado, *Periodo* 75)

Despite a constant denunciation of the colonial condition, the speaker rejects the geopolitical conception of 'country' as acknowledgement of the inherent violence produced by the nation-state as an institution, specifically the policing of its borders. As such, this poem makes a call for international solidarity grounded in a marine, archipelagic vision of sovereignty that transcends the nation-state. "Sun Bay" is a poem about Vieques: both elegiac to its natural beauty and denouncing of its present abjection.

The final section, "Huracán que no viene," confronts the elephant in the room of any book published in 2018: Hurricane Maria. This placement at the end of the volume shows both build-up and avoidance of an unspeakably raw horror and pain of the days that follow—and continue to follow, as Bonilla notes: "[w]hat characterized life after Maria thus was not progress but delay, deterioration, degradation, and the forced act of waiting" (Bonilla, "Coloniality" 2) for a response and recovery that would not come. The poem "Hack" (Delgado, *Periodo* 110) theorizes and embraces this altered sense of time that Bonilla calls "the wait of disaster" (Bonilla, "Coloniality" 1):

Ya no tengo prisa por casi nada.

Me instalo en la lentitud

como una forma de hacerle trampa

a lo que la vida espera de mí, por ejemplo (Delgado, *Periodo* 110)

The English title of the poem evokes the recent trend of 'life hacks' as advice that offers shortcuts to make daily tasks easier. In the poem, slowness is a shortcut, a coping technique, for the fast-paced transformation of life after Hurricane Maria and the crisis.

In "El dique," the language of flooding, levees, and winds in are both description of events and metaphors for the resulting psychic and emotional turmoil, a turmoil that exhausts the possibility of language and poetry:

Sé que hay
un torrente de palabras atascado en mi mano
en mi corazón, en mi pensamiento.

Ahora temo que se rompa el dique.

He visto ríos que se salen de su cauce destruir a mi país.
He visto al viento llevarse a mis amigxs. […]

No es fácil decir la arquitectura de un poema
mientras veo en las paredes de mi casa cómo nacen grietas
que se alargan cada día un poco más (90).

The metaphor of "el dique" (the levee), the title of the poem, uses the visuality of hurricane destruction as metaphor for the limits of language and poetry itself to 'contain' or express the emotions of post-Maria. The final stanza contrasts the architecture of a poem to the architecture of the speaker's physical house to decry the limits of poetic form to express the physical and

emotional decay. The poem's mere presence, however, expresses— albeit insufficiently— the contours of the physical and psychic destruction.

The poem that follows, "Frutas tropicales," (91) is one of the volume's most somber. The title sets up a contrast between the abundance it suggests and the lack and decay it conjures: "Observo con desinterés el colapso" is the poem's opening line. After reflecting on the traffic of avocados, which refers to the avocado scarcity in Puerto Rico post-Maria and the fact that importing avocados from neighboring Dominican Republic was illegal due to US shipping law restrictions, the poem continues:

> En las islas no hay humanidad.
>
> Nadie nace en las islas.
>
> Todo se prohíbe.
>
> La libertad es un símbolo,
>
> crueldad de una palabra inventada por colonizadores (91).

There is no possible freedom for the colonized: the concept is normative, originating from power and thus inapplicable to speak to the realities of the colonized. This suggests that, as observed earlier in the poem "Obras públicas," individual or personal sovereignty is impossible under the colonial regime. In articulating a definition of decoloniality in the context of contemporary Puerto Rico, Zambrana has said that "decoloniality is a praxis that seeks to unbind the world of capital/coloniality, intervening in material conditions to dislocate modes of power, being, knowing, and sensing" (Zambrana 14). She continues on to specify that "[n]otions of liberation or freedom must also be unbound from the image of the capitalist/colonial world" (14) which confirms and reinforces the poem's idea that normative conceptions of freedom are not enough, not useful to the colonized. In the poem, 'libertad' is an empty signifier of foreign colonial

imposition, and Zambrana's understanding of decoloniality confirms that freedom as a normative concept is bound to the colonial world. Delgado's poem repeatedly articulates a decolonial horizon that understands itself outside the capitalist/colonial world that Zambrana outlines. The poem's last line: "[i]mposible hacer algo ni querer hacer" (Delgado, *Periodo* 91) expresses a languid pessimism of this colonial/capital world. Yet Delgado also works through this exhaustion in the book to find moments of hope and transgression, in the shape of what Zambrana calls "land rescue/occupation, defiant refusal," and "queer laziness" (Zambrana 14). These three "praxes" of decoloniality, as Zambrana calls them, all figure in *Periodo especial*.

In "Conversación con Norysell Massanet," one of the book's final and most notable poems, land rescue/occupation is articulated as a time-place of hope. The poem chronicles a conversation with a friend, in sparse and bitingly simple lines. The poem's speaker seems to admire that friend's lifestyle, which is rooted in land, farming, and self-subsistence:

> Detrás de la ciudad entre otras cosas
> siembra hojas de varios tipos de orégano,
> hace pan a la leña,
> enrolla cigarrillos,
> hierve cuatro huevos y cuela dos
> tazas de café (Delgado, *Periodo* 113).

The poem opens by giving its back to the city (detrás de la ciudad), removing its spatial coordinates away from the urban ruins that take up the attention of most poems in the volume. The speaker admiringly lists Norysell's tasks, actions of cooking, feeding, and tending the land. The listing evokes a temporality that moves slowly, as is the case in many of the book's poems, a decolonial temporality. The next stanza italicizes Norysell's dialogue with the speaker, involving

the felling of trees and shepherding of goats, also actions that lie outside the urban realities of the island (which are present in most other poems). It continues to outline the slowness of the encounter, which also describes the contours of the friendship between the two women:

Jueves por la tarde nublada de verano,
no hay más resistencia ni más lucha posible.

Sentadas en el piso de la terraza
vemos crecer el bambú (114).

There is a pronounced weariness towards 'struggle' and 'resistance,' but the next stanzas show an enactment of resistance found not in traditionally conceived political struggle. An alternative mode of decolonial resistance is articulated, which lies in being with the land and in community, in the enactment of friendship:

por más en contra que estoy
de la Junta de Control Fiscal,
yo tampoco encuentro mi sitio
en el performance de lo político.

Sin tiempo para preámbulos cordiales
ni manifestaciones pacíficas,
nos ocupa el trabajo
y nos habita la espesura (115).

For the speaker and Delgado, decoloniality is a doing and a being, in the feminist bonds of female friendship and in the labor of land and community sustenance.

It is often repeated that Puerto Rico imports over eighty percent of the food it consumes, and though the precise number is contested (Garriga-López *Debt*), the lack of sustainable food production is one of colonialism's ugliest consequences. As such, Delgado's *Periodo especial* and Pastor's *Falsa heladería* find in natural life, local fruit growth, and fertile land distractions and practical alternatives to the destruction of colonial capitalism. In Delgado's poem, the signs of self-subsistence food ("hace pan a la leña," "siembra […] oregano") (113) evoke a slow temporality attuned to the natural world and the friendship the poem outlines. In the narration of quotidian tasks and conversation, a decolonial form of life is being enacted:

> Ella piensa en el futuro todavía
> más allá del gobierno y más acá
> de teorías conspiracionistas,
> su forma de hacer revolución
> es contundente.
> Pesticida y colmena
> no son metáfora en esta casa (Delgado, *Periodo* 115).

The speaker expresses a hint of surprise in the fact that their interlocutor 'still' ("todavía") thinks about the future, which underlines the foreclosure of futurity of the debt crisis, as discussed in the section on temporality. Revolution is imagined as a beehive, a reference to the sustenance of life as revolutionary act in the context of necropolitical colonial capitalism. This resignification of revolution hints at an exhaustion with 'Revolutions' as traditionally conceived—armed struggle, typically by masculine subjects—and instead imagines a revolution not based in futurity but in the present enactment of decolonial friendship and in community with land and the natural world.

To better understand Delgado's ethos of decolonial praxis and community, we need to look outside the page, to her labor as a maker of artisanal books who started an alternative independent publishing house and risograph print shop, La Impresora. Risograph technology hails from the 1980s, and is a form of digital printing convenient because of its low cost and artisanal aesthetics. The technology's low cost allows for the reproduction of artisanal poetic work against the absence of a publishing industry that was always small and precarious but has been all but decimated during the crisis.[27] Yet in the recuperation of a technological device from the 1980s, Delgado's project also moves against tendencies in the global publishing world that center digitalization. In so doing, the use of the risograph situates itself in an alternative temporality to that of the mainstream world of book production and publishing.

A Mano/By Hand (2020) is a pamphlet essay where Delgado reflects on her craft and labor as poet, bookmaker, and publisher, published bilingually by alternative US press Ugly Ducking Press. In this short essay, Delgado traces the development of her poetry and practice of artisanal book making and printing through the routes of her migrations. The essay articulates an understanding of poetry where writing is inseparable from the physical labor that produces the infrastructure of a book (printing, book binding, publishing) and of sustaining artistic practice under conditions of duress, such as the crisis. Delgado opens the essay by articulating the ideal conditions of a sustainable life:

> I dream of buying a big house where I can set up my workshop, La Impresora. Someday I won't owe rent to anybody. I want to live near the beach, establish a seasonal residency for writers and collaborators, and begin to create a network with nodes on other Caribbean islands. I want to grow vegetables, install solar panels, and build a cistern to

[27] A thorough study of the effects of the crisis on the Puerto Rican publishing industry is needed, but the surge and increasing popularity of DIY, alternative, and independent publishing is undeniable.

> store rainwater—all of this is part of the project. And of course, I want to continue making books of poetry (Delgado, *A Mano* 3).

This paragraph captures the political and ethical contours of Delgado's definition of poetry, or a life in which poetry is sustainable. Her dream has begun to become a reality—La Impresora moved to Isabela, a small city on the West Coast of the island, near the beach, in early 2021. The wish list includes freedom from the strictures of the housing market, a proximity to the ocean that does not come from a tourist gaze but in search of Caribbean networks and community. The desire to grow food and rely on electricity partly stems from the aftermath of the crisis and the hurricane, when the lack of such basic needs became a grim central feature of daily life. These are also central themes to her poems, as we have seen. In flight from institutionality, in community and sustenance, the essay articulates a maroon lifestyle as an example of Delgado's vision for decolonial praxis. Despite acknowledging that "it's hard to imagine a future" (3) from the present coordinates of crisis, in the everyday practice of poetry, physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance, and in community, decolonial life is already being enacted. She continues: "[b]ut the challenge goes beyond not dying of hunger/ The challenge—the project—is to live with dignity, to achieve real quality of life, to create community in the process and find joy doing so" (3). As we will also see below with Pastor's poetics, the refusal of victimhood and anti-colonial/capitalist/indebted dignity and joy are central to the project of decolonial feminist life.

Mara Pastor's *Falsa heladería* (2018) was released only shortly before Delgado's book, and it takes a different route to the same moment: the fallout of the debt crisis and Hurricane Maria. Pastor's previous works are more lyrical, but in this book, she opts for sparse verses that narrate small vignettes of quotidian life. As such, Pastor's poetics of the crisis focus on finding hope in everyday life stories of labor, community, and feminist care. Whereas Delgado's work

dwells on the fatigue of crisis life, Pastor insists on quotidian stories that show the contours of crisis capaciously enough to include beauty and denunciation.

The volume opens with a hemispheric nudge towards decolonial imagination: in the poem "Los bustos de Martí" all of José Martí's statues globally have started speaking. Yet at the end of the poem:

> […] el parloteo era tan masivo, estridente,
> que un Martí hacía imposible escuchar al otro,
> y todos a su vez se hacían rugido inofensivo,
> plomo fundido, ceniza de árbol (28).

The book makes clear from the start that its decolonial imagination does not lie in the monumental or the masculine. The poem's initial images of Martí busts "parloteando" in cities across the globe is a beautiful decolonial image, but the poem's ending (cited above) makes clear that the monumental is insufficient, and thus begins to lay out a conception of decolonial possibility rooted in feminist care and community. The poem that follows begins to articulate this: titled "Beatriz Madagán," (29) it tells the story of a mother in Mexico who crossed the border to the US in "una cajuela" with her children but later decided to return, because: "el miedo, dijo,/no es una madre en una cajuela/ esperando a que le quiten un hijo, el miedo es no atreverse a hacer otra cosa" (29-30). In the contrast between these two opening poems we can find the book's decolonial vision: not a future goal to be found in the History of great men, in monuments or in political movements, but a praxis that is present and ongoing, a doing in the everyday life of mothers and women as laborers who manage to center community and lives of beauty and dignity amidst the necropolitical colonial crisis.

The stories the poems tell are mostly anecdotes from everyday life, in Puerto Rico but also in Mexico and elsewhere. Many are stories of labor, broadly construed: wage work as well as the unpaid and often unrecognized reproductive labor and the labor of care. “Lectura en un comedor universitario” removes the romantic aura of poetry readings and thus the poet’s labor, instead finding beauty in the mundane:

> Un joven dejó el tenedor en la mesa
> y nos miró fijamente mientras tragaba.
> Me apresuré a leerle mi poema
> mientras terminaba el bocado.
> Regresó el tenedor a su boca
> y lo tomé como una buena reacción (33).

The interaction between poet and audience is mediated by the act of eating and locates it inside a (purportedly university) cafeteria, both of which shed the reverence typically leant to poetry readings. It also serves to expose a socioeconomic context: a cafeteria reading probably would not happen in an elite or wealthy institution. The quoted stanza contrasts the poet’s labor with the student’s meal, the eating (tragar) feeds and alters the reading, the poet’s labor responding to its somewhat haphazard, but in that special, context.

Various poems in this section tackle the tension between reverence for male art in the public sphere and these artists’ relation to and treatment of women in their private lives. “Bela Tarr en el cine club” (37) reflects on a personal friendship with a man with whom she watched films by Béla Tarr. Béla Tarr is a cult European filmmaker revered by the Western literary canon and the beauty of the imagery in his films is juxtaposed with her friend’s violence towards his

partner. The poem "Observaciones" (40) tackles the same theme, again locating the poetry reading as a site to be demystified:

> Las novias
> de algunos poetas
> casi no hablan. […]
> Quiero hacerme
> amiga de algunos poetas
> pero sus novias,
> que no hablan,
> no me lo recomiendan (40-41).

The sparsity of these lines echoes the silence the poem refers to, as the fact of silence belies an active *silencing* of the women's voices. One of Pastor's main tasks in the book is to deflate the ego and sanctity of the figure of the poet—she does this by revealing the mundane aspects of the poet's labor (her own, often) and thus positing it in relation with the waged labor of teaching, and the many forms of reproductive labor: mothering, domestic work, emotional and community care. In this poem, she speaks directly about/to male poets and the lack of care in their intimate lives, thus dethroning their figures and addressing the all-too-common sexism pervasive in the literary and cultural worlds, and the disconnect between interiority/private sphere and the halo of poetic greatness of the public sphere for poets.

The vignettes in the poems tackle the waged work of teaching, ("Lecciones") of performing poetry, (as discussed in "Lectura en un comedor universitario") and writing poetry ("Cuentos 2014"). All these actions are crossed by the impoverished material circumstances of the crisis on the island. Pastor's previous books were written in and from the diaspora, the poetic

voice employing a cosmopolitan and wandering gaze. Yet this collection, like Delgado's *Periodo especial*, marks a return to the islands, and thus the poetic subject is localized and observes quotidian life on the island in this moment of crisis. The reality of economic crisis—of austerity, low wages and precarized work, is present throughout the volume, peppering the subject's quotidian reality. In "Cuentos 2014," the speaker comes across a document with this title on their computer and opens it only to realize a misspelling for "cuentas," bills to pay. "Liquidación" (78) is a love poem about leisure with a loved one "aunque no cobremos el mes próximo" (79). "Jeep Cherokee" (98) is a moving account of fatherly care also tinged with material precariousness: "Como ahora gano lo mismo/que cuando era estudiante,/la Jeep es una limosina" (98). It is also a comment on the precarity of university faculty labor under the crisis, since throughout the volume the speaker alludes to their labor as university faculty.

In most of these poems, the crisis becomes part of the landscape, and austerity and precarization are circumstances that shape life but remain somewhat in the background of the book's poetic project. This project regarding the crisis is more about finding beauty and dignity within these circumstances, a refusal of indebted guilt and victimhood, of allowing debt and austerity to define the subject's full range of experience. Yet a handful of poems attend closely to the devastation of crisis. "El rompeolas" reckons with the weight of the many interwoven disasters that result from austerity:

> Contaban con la deuda,
> pero no con los metales pesados en el agua,
> el cadmio en la ceniza que respiran.
>
> Nada preparó para la pobreza de la casa,

el derrumbe de un pedazo de piscina,

una muela por la que su madre

tendrá que esperar tres meses

porque la enfermedad también hace fila (58).

Debt appears here as the root problem, but environmental degradation is quickly added to the list, through a reference to the coal ashes dumped in vulnerable communities on the southern coast of the islands and routinely protested (Alfonso). In the following stanza, the images turn to middle-class decay and the impoverished health services that result from the lack of doctors on the islands as a result of the exodus of the past decade. The response to these forms of slow violence is feminist defiance:

y sopesar los pedazos de la isla,

sus metales pesados,

los seres queridos que se van;

pensar, desde otra orilla, en la sobrevivencia,

y entre tanto aedes, en el amor.

Regreso para pisar esta tierra

y caminar con las mujeres

que vuelven a este rompeolas

a detener la marejada (Pastor 59-60).

In one of the book's most triumphant moments, the speaker asserts their return migration to the island as a form of resistance against the many woes of the crisis. It's crucial to note that the return is not individual but rather a collective or community of women, whose collective presence refuses the pathologies of guilt, victimhood, docility, and thus indebtedness. Once

again, decoloniality is to be found in feminist community and in the praxis of resistance—returning to the island to build community is itself a form of resistance. Zambrana tells us that debt "has the capacity to deprive us of the future itself" (84). In the poem, the "marejada" is the non-future that clouds the islands, and the community of women that walk toward it challenge this deprivation of the future through the praxis of feminist community.

Raquel Salas Rivera's *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* is a much more maximalist and angry account of life under La Junta and, centrally, a queer and diasporic perspective of life under crisis. The book's title alludes to the hierarchy of issues in traditional Leftist circles: primary issues were those that referred to politics, and interpersonal (read: gender, racial, or other power dynamics present between activists) issues were deemed as secondary. *The Tertiary*, then, centers a third dimension excluded from this flawed model: transgender issues. In doing so, it also points to the inextricability of the interpersonal and the political. In the volume, trans experience, Marxist dictums, and colonialism in both its grandest and most personal scales are brought together in invigorating ways.

Lo terciario/the tertiary confronts the violence of the debt crisis and colonialism considered together. Textually, the book is a response to and dialogue with a Spanish translation of Marx's *Das Kapital* by Francisco Scaron (1976), popular in PR leftist circles (and one first layer of how translation is central to the author's project), and to the passing of PROMESA. The book incorporates and mimics the language of Marx and of PROMESA, showing that despite these texts are ideologically opposed, they both reproduce cold and callous language: PROMESA in its articulation of violence veiled under technocratic legalese, Marx in its cold rationality that erases humanity from its discussion of inequality/exploitation. The titles of many poems directly mimic or play with titles from Marx's Capital.

In this play between technocratic institutional language and affectively charged vernacular Puerto Rican Spanish, the author pits two value systems against each other. The question of 'who owes what to whom' is pondered at two different levels: first, the poems theorize on make apparent the link between debt and colonialism, and thus the 'debt' owed to PR by the US for over a century of colonial extraction and dispossession, and second, two opposed ways of thinking about debt are confronted: the egregious mathematical value of the $72 billion debt is measured up against the incommensurable value of human (Puerto Rican) life.

The practice of self-translation in this book is notable: the title is itself bilingual, and the book is divided into two different sections, one for each language, rather than the practice of setting translations side by side on the page. This is revealing of Salas Rivera's translation practice/ethos: there is no goal of neutrality: his privileging of Spanish—and specifically, vernacular Puerto Rican Spanish—is a decolonial textual practice that acknowledges the power dynamics between languages and the geopolitical implications of translating vernacular PR Spanish into English for a US audience. The translation choices throughout *lo terciario/the tertiary* show how Salas Rivera protects the specificities of Puerto Rican lived experience. Salas Rivera uses the term 'knots' (Murray Román 88) to refer to untranslatable terms that appear in the original Spanish in the translation because they are so closely tied to experience and affect that to attempt to translate them would be assimilationist. In readings in the US, he often reads only Spanish or a Spanish version followed by a translation, which provokes a momentary discomfort on Anglo-speaking audiences that is also decolonial in centering the linguistic colonized experience and producing a sense of discomfort that mimics that of immigrants in the US attempting to understand English.

Perhaps no poem better articulates the intersection of queerness, colonialism, finance, and state power than the poem "through the opposite act of circulation, or the inverse metamorphosis":

en puerto rico 117 estaciones hidrológicas
cesarán sus operaciones,
pero seguimos operando
los jevos de la alteridad,
lagrimales de palomas,
rindiendo nuestro sucio
para sanar este mundo de su pureza (Salas Rivera, *Terciario* 56).

As crucial environmental infrastructure collapses as a result of the crisis, what is left is a sense of queer futurity. In the poem, environmental abandonment and pollution are resisted by queer subjects whose own sense of 'dirty' vindicates colonial and financial decay.

Marx gets a nod and a needed reckoning: poem titles such as "las mercancías no pueden ir por sí solas al mercado" (45) and "quedará siempre un sustrato material" (26) invoke Marxist principles while critiquing the abstraction of his language, which denounces inequality but is cold and lacking in humanization. The book's opening poem, "todas sus propiedades sensibles se han esfumado" declares:

pero el valor que es valor de uso sólo lo tiene porque tío jun arreglaba sillas
y porque titi irma perdió la cordura y escribía cartas
donde la letra crecía hasta llenar páginas enteras

and "el alcalde fue a su funeral porque era amada, dijo, y porque acumuló valor para el pueblo entero" (12). The use of Marxist language reflects on the material conditions of crisis while

highlighting its insufficiency to queer colonized subjects in the twenty-first century and critiquing the absence of affect and humanity that has permeated Marxist discourse about economic inequality for centuries.

The poems are both timeless and deeply enmeshed in the details of the islands' current predicament. In the long "si ellas se niegan a que las tomen, éste puede recurrir a la violencia o, en otras palabras, apoderarse de ellas," Salas Rivera rails against members of La Junta who have a socially sanctioned job to collect the unpayable $72 billion debt. On David Skeel, appointed member and current president of the board, he writes:

> nenes como David le dicen a sus maestras que quieren ser policías, o
> mejor, se hacen ricos y hacen bien. Conocí a david de chiquito. Salía
> en nick at nite. soñaba que deambulaba por algún pasillo, perseguido
> por demonios coloniales. cuando seas grande, david, gobernarás mi
> país, si eres divino, si eres dios. bajarás el salario mínimo, cortarás los
> presupuestos de los hospitales, cerrarás las escuelas (74).

Here, the ravages of colonialism are nothing but the quotidian realities and successes of the colonizer. Tying the effects of the crisis' austerity to the platitudes of the white American middle class is an indictment of its inherent complicity into Puerto Rico's colonial dispossession. The establishment of the Fiscal Control Board in 2016 was a transformative event in Puerto Rican history because it unmasked the bureaucratic disguises of US colonialism. *Lo terciario/the Tertiary* was published in 2018, and thus it is clearly written in the immediate fury of this moment but is also intended to be an enduring record against the tragedy of this historical juncture.

Salas Rivera's rage against the present of US colonialism invokes and revitalizes Puerto Rican nationalist and anti-colonial poetry, leaving behind the patriarchal conservatism with which this style is often associated. The anti-colonialism of these poems shares the epic range and pays homage to the likes of Juan Antonio Corretjer, but is imbued with queer transgression:

> en Puerto rico el agua limpia
> vendrá quizás, como dijo corretjer,
> ensangrentada,
> o quizás es que la sangre
> nunca limpia nuestra
> carga su viscosidad con la rabia
> de cincuenta culos
> de placer penetrable (57).

This stanza also exemplifies the attention to ecological destruction as a colonial issue. From the literary tradition, it converses with Juan Antonio Corretjer's famous verse in Oubao Moin "el rio de Corozal/el de la leyenda dorada/la corriente arrastra oro/la corriente está ensangrentada," (Corretjer) which is the pinacle of anti-colonialist poetics, and refers to the blood of indigenous violence and resistance.

Yet Salas Rivera also plays with the cliches of nationalism: "cada vez que escribes MUERTE A LOS COLONIZADORES/nace un coquí dorado" (51) and thus articulates a decolonial imaginary rooted in liberatory desire that is also queer desire. The decolonial future conjured by the poems is forged by the centering of queer identity and breaking down of racial and gender hierarchies that pervade traditional Leftist anti-colonialism, as well as the celebration

of the powerful affect of everyday Boricua colloquialisms. This imaginary also insists on a return to the natural world as the decolonial outside of the myriad of abuses the book bears witness to:

evolución inversa:

volvemos al mar.

los que no saben dejan sus botines en la arena

se ahogarán en el aire (47).

Another remarkable feature of the book not discussed so far is its bilingualism: In addition to the Spanish poems cited here, the book is published in a bilingual edition that is self-translated into English by the author. Throughout, Spanish has primacy and is the language of intimacy and affection, of the decolonial future the book outlines. Yet the book's English translation opens it up to Puerto Rico's ever-growing diaspora, as well as grants it wider circulation and success in the US literary market: on the year of its publication Salas Rivera was named Philadelphia's Poet Laureate. As such, island and diaspora relations are also evoked and energized. Salas Rivera's diaspora is that of the mass migration of the twenty-first century, of which professional young adults such as him are a big part. This population has been expulsed as a result of the austerity decried in the book and has had to witness the collapse of the islands in real time from the belly of the beast. As such, the fact that the book is also in English is key to speak with US-based Puerto Ricans, as well as to set up a conversation that implicates North Americans and their complicity in Puerto Rico's current predicament.

Here I must note the positionality of the poets. Returning to an island in crisis may also be read as a privilege. The poets I have analyzed in this chapter are white Puerto Ricans, mostly young, middle-class professionals that have lived and attended graduate school in the US, with

the exception of Pietri.[28] Pastor, Delgado and Godreau are all part of a young cultural elite on the islands, as is Salas Rivera, though he also has visibility in the poetic landscape of the US. Living on the island, they suffer the impacts of austerity, forming part of the besieged faculty of the University of Puerto Rico (Pastor and Salas Rivera), or living precariously off the publishing and editing industry in Puerto Rico (Delgado). Yet they are also cosmopolitan global subjects with important class and racial privileges on the islands. They are part of a new generation of writers that is young, queer, and thus outside the historical centers of lettered power, in opposition to the lettered elites of the paternalist order that Juan Gelpí describes in *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico* (1994).

In Puerto Rico, their writing follows a tradition of feminist poetry that spans the canon's most visible figures: Julia de Burgos and Lola Rodríguez de Tió, exceptions to an otherwise patriarchal, male-dominated literary field. They are perhaps most closely heiresses to the writings of the 'generación del sesenta,' which includes the feminist voices of Marigloria Palma and Ángela María Dávila, which all are in conversation with. As such, they are subaltern subjects within the Puerto Rican literary canon, despite their individual positions of privilege, which are almost standard in Puerto Rican letters.[29] They do not write to reinscribe power or mark the contours of the colonial nation but rather to resist and reimagine worlds outside it. The works of Salas Rivera, Pastor, and Delgado, considered together, produce knowledge on the experience of

[28] Mara Pastor has a PhD in Spanish Literature from the University of Michigan, has lived in Mexico, and has recently relocated back in PR and works as a professor at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. Nicole Delgado started a master's in literature at the University of New York in Albany, but abandoned her studies and also moved to Mexico. The books from each I analyzed in this chapter speak of their return to and resettlement in Puerto Rico under the crisis. Raquel Salas Rivera has a more diasporic background, moving between the islands and the US since childhood, also completing a PhD in Spanish literature from the University of Pennsylvania, and chosen as Poet Laureate of the City of Philadelphia when *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* was published. Ariadna Godreau-Aubert obtained a graduate degree from the University of Oxford. Pedro Pietri, on the other hand, did not have any formal education.

[29] The recently published poetry about crisis from Mayra Santos Febres and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro would offer a Black feminist perspective of the crisis, and must be studied and included in further comprehensive analysis of feminist Boricua poetry.

crisis and indebtedness, and enact feminist and queer communities as counter utopias to the crisis' devastation. I will now move on to closely read one poem from each of the works that deals with debt specifically.

"Hay una deuda" is one of a series of poems that reckon with and refuse indebtedness, theorize its embodied and affective contours, and articulate a feminist decolonial response to the indebted condition. It contains theoretical articulations for the refusal of indebtedness, which are also present in "Obras públicas" from Nicole Delgado's *Periodo especial* (2019), Raquel Salas-Rivera's "no se cambia una chaqueta por una chaqueta" from *lo terciario/the tertiary* (2018) and "Puerto Rican Obituary" by Pedro Pietri, as well as in the essay "Nosotras que no nos debemos a nadie: las propias en tiempos de austeridad y deuda pública" from Ariadna Godreau's *Las propias: hacia una pedagogía de las endeudadas* (2018). They all theorize on the relationship between indebtedness and coloniality, and provide reflections on indebtedness as an economic, moral, and social relationship. I will read Mara Pastor's "Hay una deuda," followed by Raquel Salas Rivera's "coats are not exchanged for coats" and Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary" as diasporic theorizations on the temporality of debt. From these poems I will move on to consider Delgado's "Obras públicas" as and Godreau's essay as expressions of feminist (ir)responsibility in the face of indebtedness. I will then offer readings of Delgado's *Periodo especial* and Pastor's *Falsa heladeria* and Salas-Rivera's *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* to explore the affective contours of writing from the crisis and the type of ecopoetics as decolonial response that emerge from their poetry.

'Hay una deuda'

The first stanza of Mara Pastor's "Hay una deuda" discussed above is also an allusion to José Maria Lima's poem "hay un rio de calamidades acentuadas," cited in the poem's epigraph. Pastor mimics Lima's original lines:

> hay una canción
>
> pero está rota
>
> y es inútil decirla en pedacitos (Lima 14).

This intertextuality places Lima as both ancestor and interlocutor, continuing and updating Lima's poetic tradition of denunciation. Lima is a maverick of the mid-twentieth century radical 'generación del setenta,' and Pastor situates her poetic voice as heir to this tradition and expands it to speak about the current shape of US exploitation of Puerto Rico: the debt. Pastor's poem replaces the suggested beauty of 'song' in the original verse with 'debt,' re-signifying Lima's statement into an interrogation of the truism that debt must always be paid, and an indictment on the colonial logic of the Puerto Rican debt and indebtedness broadly. In *La revolución de las apetencias: el tráfico de muertos en la literatura puertorriqueña contemporánea* (2021), Melanie Pérez Ortíz argues that death is the organizing narrative of Puerto Rican literature in the last twenty years, and that because of this, writers constantly invoke their literary ancestors, or the Puerto Rican literary tradition, as a way to speak to the current crisis. She states: "[l]a literatura de la isla y sus diásporas, pensada como sistema y como una parte perceptible, comprobable, de la conciencia colectiva, se está reconstituyendo en un diálogo con el pasado en busca de imaginarse el futuro" (Pérez Ortiz 17). Pastor's intertext with Lima is a dialogue between two generations of poets that have challenged colonialism's exploitation as a source of death in their poetry. The generational shift from one to the other is most markedly notable in the feminist ethos of Pastor's poem. Pastor continues:

Hay un *magestad*

pero está mal escrito

y es inútil decirlo rey.

Hay un rey

pero está en pedacitos

y es inútil decirlo en deuda.

Hay una lengua

pero está en deuda

y es inútil decirla (Pastor 89-90).

The misspelled 'magestad' is a reference to the King of Spain's visit to the celebration of the Congreso de la Lengua Española in Puerto Rico in 2015— the word was misspelled during his televised speech (Fadellin). The irony of the situation is obvious, but the misspelling—an old spelling—makes a claim about the presence of raw colonial power on the islands. 'Deuda' and 'magestad' are equated as forms of colonial oppression, which aesthetically invoke a colonial past like that staged by Miranda's *Hamilton*. Debts, kings, and languages are forms of colonial power, yet the 'but' in the second line of each stanza undermines their purported totality. The forms of power listed are thus unsettled with actions that undermine them: to misspell, to break into pieces, to be indebted. As such, the poem makes the claim that there are fundamental deceits in the functions of debts, kings, and languages that undermine their claims to power in the first place.

Pastor's invocation of the figure of the king in relation to debt accentuates the hierarchical power it carries. It proposes that being in a relationship of debt puts the debtor in a violent state of hierarchy, not unequal to that of colonialism. Yet in the poem, the misspelling of

the word majesty is a nudge: there is a fundamental flaw in its naming, and thus it is useless to give it the semantic power of its name. The same thing happens with debt: the all-powerful nature of debt is undermined precisely by the purported scope of its power: the debt is so inequitable and all mighty that it erodes its own terms of possibility. Pastor then continues with a variation of the beginning of the poem:

> Pero tengo una deuda
>
> está rota
>
> y es inútil pagarla (90).

Declaring Puerto Rico's debt is broken denounces its coloniality, but also questions the neutrality of debt relations generally. Debt is not merely a transaction between equals, but rather, as Rocío Zambrana asserts, "functions as an apparatus of capture, predation, extraction" that "involves expulsion, dispossession, and precarization through which race/gender/class hierarchies are deepened, intensified, posited anew" (10). Pastor's condemnation of debt speaks from the specific position of a feminized body on the islands, articulating a condemnation of debt that is differential because of its gender coordinates.

Debt is broken on two levels: the specific debt alluded to is corrupt because it is colonial, and debt generally is a violent mechanism of subjugation that obfuscates its own violence. As David Graeber suggests, "there's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt—above all, because it immediately makes it seem that *it's the victim who's doing something wrong*" (Graeber, *Debt* 5, emphasis mine). This mechanism of rendering debtors culpable is at the heart of debt's predation, and in the case of Puerto Rico, it updates and deepens the colonial trope of

irresponsibility. Indebtedness confirms the pathological irresponsibility of colonial subjects. The reasoning goes: had they been fiscally responsible, Puerto Ricans wouldn't be in this situation.

Guilt is inscribed in the essence of debt—in German, the word *Schuld(en)* signifies both debt and guilt. In *Una lectura feminista de la deuda: Vivas, libres, y desendeudadas nos queremos,* Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago declare that by narrating debt—what they call "sacar del closet a la deuda—" (11) debt's abstract power is demystified and dismantled. Pastor's poetic rendering of debt is a form of narrating debt and thus, as Cavallero and Gago argue, getting rid of the guilt that debt inscribes, and inscribes differentially, on raced, classed, and feminized bodies:

> Sacar del closet a la deuda es entonces un movimiento político *contra la culpa,* contra la abstracción de la dominación que quieren ejercer las finanzas y contra la moral de buenas pagadoras con que se propagandiza a los cuerpos feminizados como sujetxs responsables predilectos de la obligación financiera (13, emphasis mine).

Pastor's poem, as well as poems I will discuss by Nicole Delgado and Raquel Salas Rivera, are forms of poetic discourse that "sacan la deuda del closet" (11) and in so doing, challenge and refuse indebted subjectivity and offer models of decolonial praxis.

"Hay una deuda" also claims that language is a form of debt—in communicating, something is always owed. Language is indebted and insufficient, the signifier will always be indebted to its signified. This is one of the main concerns of Pastor's work, and of *Falsa heladería* generally. The distance between naming and the thing that is named is the space of owing. Language also has a colonial debt; for the colonized that are stripped of any native language, language is also lacking as expression of resistance to that power. The colonial

language of power (Spanish), which this poem uses to challenge the coloniality of power that debt supposes, is indebted— its power being a product of colonial legacy. Colonial debt is not just the economic and material debt of the current debt crisis, but the poem also alludes to older and more transcendent debts—coloniality itself is a debt. The allusion to language suggests debt is also a form of naming: its power stems from its declaration, as the as-of-yet unsuccessful citizens' campaign for the debt audit shows.[30] The poem continues:

> No tengo
>
> 1
>
> 2
>
> 3
>
> 4
>
> 5
>
> 6 pelícanos,
>
> pero los debo. (Pastor 91)

In this stanza, the impersonal verb "hay," which connotes the overbearing presence of debt, shifts to the first-person possessive "tengo." This marks the transformation of debt from abstract source of power to embodied experience that "lands" (Zambrana 10) in the poetic subject's life. The poem lists 'things' the speaker has: a debt, and doesn't have: six pelicans and later three girls and five small islands. The attention to feminized bodies, fauna, and land suggests that the exploitation extends to both embodied subjectivity and natural resources. As Zambrana reminds us, debt's operation as a form of coloniality "capture[s] value, land, the body, sensation itself" (40). This also suggests that indebtedness is the only possible form of ownership, nothing is

[30] A lot of organizing by civilians has created a large campaign calling for its audit, which has all but been ignored by the local government and the Fiscal Control Board. http://www.auditoriaya.org/

owned except for the condition of indebtedness, whereas natural, living things: birds, girls, land, are owed rather than in possession.

As Guillermo Rebollo-Gil states:

> For while islanders, under PROMESA, [the sinister name given to the Fiscal Control Board] can no longer speak of *our* government, or *our* democracy, or even of *our* way of life, the debt—insomuch as the USA offered no alternative recourse for its management—is the one thing we've got, the sum of our sovereignty (Rebollo-Gil, *Writing* 40).

Rebollo-Gil's use of the possessive pronoun 'our' highlights the poem's theme of indebtedness as only form of ownership under the crisis. Rebollo-Gil suggests the extent of Puerto Rican sovereignty is the debt itself, pointing to the contradiction of sharing a collective responsibility for debt when the incurring in its terms and most importantly its profits, were not shared. Despite this, the consequences of debt—the austerity measures imposed, which have all but decimated public infrastructure such as education, health, and energy, and thus dramatically impoverished people's way of life in Puerto Rico —are a burden shared by the Puerto Rican population, albeit differentially among race, gender, and class lines. Debt-as-sovereignty means precarization-as-sovereignty.

> No tengo 1
>
> 2
>
> 3 niñas,
>
> pero las debo. No tengo
>
> 1

2

3

4

5 islotes, pero los debo.

Tengo un pedacito

pero está roto

y no es inútil decirlo (Pastor 91-92).

Visually, the poem's enumeration of numbers and 'things' the speaker does not own resembles the counting—or dropping, as each number occupies its own line down the page—of coins, as if invoking the action of repayment. Formally, the list has the effect of simultaneously being counted and falling off the page as it is being counted, like falling coins whose visual occupation of individual lines on the poem creates a feeling of the weariness of accumulation (of debt).

The list also signals the disproportionate targets of debt violence and draws a parallel between woman and land as primary victims of colonial debt violence. Fanon has said that "[f]or a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land" (67*)*, so it is no coincidence that coloniality and indebtedness target the land. [31] The mention of 'islote' evokes the island as a whole, both geologically and politically, and situates

[31] Land is currently targeted in Puerto Rico through the tax break policies of Laws 20 and 22, which allow US Americans with yearly incomes of over $1 million to acquire a PR address (purchasing land) and avoid paying federal taxes, property taxes, and reduces capital gains taxes to four percent. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the amount of 'resident investors,' as they are called, increased dramatically, making the beneficiaries of these laws a class of gentrifying settlers on the islands. Other more recent measures such as the so-called 'Opportunity Zones,' designated in 2018 under the Trump presidency tax reform, lower federal income taxes on investments on 'low-income communities.' While states usually designate up to 25% of low-income areas as opportunity zones, in Puerto Rico a colonial exception decreed that 98% of land was considered opportunity zones, all but ensuring further gentrification and land displacement for Puerto Ricans. For more, see Mineta and Cintrón Arbasetti.

Pastor's poetics in the tradition of archipelagic feminist thought and ecopoetics.[32] Focusing its attention on the outsized effects of austerity and indebtedness, the poem outlines a feminist decolonial horizon that critiques the simultaneous exploitation of women and the land, while centering them as key sites of liberation.

The last stanza closes the poem on a hopeful note: "I have a small piece, broken, and it's not useless to name." Despite the pessimism of the poem's general tone, in which there seems to be no outside indebtedness, this 'piece' seems to be outside the realm of what can be possessed by the power of debts, kings, and creditors. That the 'objects' mentioned are the land(scape) itself and those who inhabit it suggests the only outside indebtedness is that which cannot be materially possessed. The poetry of crisis looks to the natural world for refuge, gesturing towards ecopoetics as a site of decolonial resistance.

The Temporality of Debt – Salas Rivera and Pietri

Raquel Salas Rivera's *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* is a bilingual poetry volume that reflects on Marxism, colonialism, Puerto Rico's economic crisis, environmental exploitation of the islands, and transfeminist politics. The book's title refers to a Puerto Rican translation of Marx's *Das Kapital* which was popular in leftist circles in Puerto Rico, and its structure is set up as a conversation with Marxist principles. The title of each poem cites a phrase from the translation, an axiom of Marxist theory. "No se cambia una chaqueta por una chaqueta" alludes to the famous example Marx uses to explain use versus exchange value. The poem offers a satirical allegory of the debt crisis in Puerto Rico. The poem's speaker narrates the collection of a debt

[32] Here I'm referencing Noel, "Islote," which discusses Nicole Delgado's archipelagic ecopoetry.

"acumulada por 50 años" (Salas Rivera 20).[33] In the poem, the debt collection is an intergenerational family affair, where the debtor is not so much an individual (an indebted man) but rather a family lineage enmeshed in intricate webs of community. In it, the speaker's mother tries unsuccessfully to pay back a debt as an allegory for the gendered and intergenerational sacrifices indebtedness callously demands.

The poem starts by setting up a juxtaposition between labor and debt: "Tomemos dos mercancías, por ejemplo,/50 años de trabajo y una deuda/Acumulada por 50 años" (20). Labor and debt are referred to as commodities, in a nudge to the way these two concepts are sources of exploitation under capitalism. The tone of the poem satirizes the supposed neutrality of institutional language, which belies the violence and exploitation of their demands. The second stanza reveals the gendered subject: "como propietaria de la primera" (20)—the speaker of the poem narrates the experience of their mother—and thus the markedly gendered impact of debt on the poem's tale. The "caribe hilton bancario" (20) is the satirical location of debt payment, poking irony at the common source of finance and colonialism: the Caribe Hilton Hotel in San Juan is a product of the Operation Bootstrap in the 1950s, and thus steeped in the colonial aura of Puerto Rican modernization. It was founded on a typical business model for Puerto Rico: 'inviting' US investors by offering them 'attractive' deals, the colonial visitor economy model discussed in the first chapter. The poem continues:

donde *daría mi vida por pagar esta deuda*.

pero te explican que *no da*

[33] *Lo terciario/The Tertiary* is a bilingual poetry volume, where one half contains the poems in Spanish and the other half in English. In interviews, Salas Rivera has noted that she writes the poems originally in Spanish and then self-translates them. Here I quote from the Spanish version, considering it the original. The language and translation politics of this book are fascinating and deserve more scholarly attention.

The tropes of guilt and sacrifice are revealed here: debt demands the debtor's life, their subjectivity, and that is still not enough. The (female) indebted subject is forced to offer her life as sacrifice for repayment, alluding to the way Puerto Ricans' lives have been interrupted and worsened as an effect of austerity. These stanzas offer a precise definition of indebted subjectivity, a form of bondage that exceeds the economic transaction and reaches the psychic and affective realms of the subject, defining her as *endeudada*, entangling her very subjectivity with the guilt of repayment and always demanding more.

> así como la deuda y los 50 años de trabajo son *valores de uso*
> *cualitativamente diferentes*, son *cualitativamente diferentes*
> los trabajos por medio de los cuales llegan a existir: el del
> inversionista y el del colonizado. tu vida no es suficiente. tendrás

que pagarla con el trabajo de tus hijos y los hijos de tus hijos (20). Under colonial debt, the role of creditor is exchangeable with 'inversionista' and the debtor's with 'colonizado.' The poem suggests their labor and experiences are incommensurate. The last line in this stanza underscores once again the inherited and intergenerational nature of debt, impacting not individual subjectivities but families and communities across generations. In the next stanza, the poem lists an inventory of the debt's heirs:

> […] tus vecinas, el perro que saquea tu basura
> doña sophia con su rosario luminoso,
> tu abuela que apenas sale a la farmacia,
> angelía que aún espera tu libro,
> luis que finalmente tiene empleo pero con deuda todavía,
> y el tipo que te asaltó por diez pesos (20-21).

This amounts to an inventory of the indebted/colonized and is comprised of members of the speaker's community: the neighbors, grandmother, and a man so poor he mugs them for ten dollars, a comment on the relational poverty of colonized communities. Following this logic, the indebted/colonized is not an individual subject but a collective. The effects of austerity and its violence are impossible to reduce to individual subjectivities; they are relational. In signaling the communal and intergenerational lineage of indebtedness, the poem also makes an argument about the temporality of debt. Using the concept of the afterlife of slavery to think through its application to Puerto Rico's debt, Zambrana says:

> the afterlife of slavery/property is not a legacy, then, if by legacy we understand the result of something past or passed on. It is rather an operating rationality and sensibility organizing the very reproduction of life through the attrition of life in the present. In the case of Puerto Rico, in the life of the colonized, skewed life chances and spectacular forms of violence are both part of the ordinary. Both index the productivity of colonial violence in the present. The present *is* the past, then, in altered material-historical conditions (13).

In simpler terms: colonial debt is not a phenomenon of the past. Debt itself renders colonialism ever-present. It cannot be part of an afterlife if it dictates present life conditions. Debt as lineage means that it travels through generations, foreclosing not individual lives but communities and generations. On temporalities, Melanie Pérez Ortiz adds:

> [p]ienso que algunas consecuencias de la muerte de un orden, para quienes habitamos en la parte del planeta que fue introducida a los tiempos modernos—esa temporalidad de la prisa, la idea del progreso, de la superación continua de las condiciones de vida, de la explotación de la naturaleza, la idea de la participación ciudadana en el gobierno—es que

> *pasamos a ocupar un tiempo histórico fuera del tiempo (así se siente)*, puesto que estamos desprendidos del mundo premoderno, organizado en torno a la naturaleza y sus ciclos, el tiempo circular y la idea de que somos sólo una parte de un cosmos que no podemos ni debemos querer controlar, a la vez que nos salimos del tiempo lineal de la modernidad mientras el ángel de la historia (Benjamin) nos impulsa hacia la quiebra económica del país (17, my emphasis).

Pérez Ortiz's describes the unique temporal place of Puerto Rico, stressing its affective dimension ("así se siente"), caught in a crossroads between lineal Western modernity, which was haphazardly imposed, and severed from pre-modern conceptions of time. This complicates the idea that Puerto Rico's debt temporality is not merely being stuck in the past, but rather out of place between two distinct models of time, neither of which it can lay claim to.

In the following stanza of the poem, the creditor continues to list their insatiable thirst for power: "pero te dicen/te faltan los ríos" (Salas Rivera 21) and goes on to list fourteen rivers in Puerto Rico as the new form of payment. Debt payment has shifted from demanding individual labor to the communities that surround it, to natural resources, a list of increasingly absurd and cruel forms of collection that work as metaphors for the unsparing toll of debt colonialism. Colonialism exploits and extracts labor, the people that perform said labor, and the environment where such labor is produced. Visually, the stanza mimics the curved flow of a river, a typographic gesture that signals the primacy of environmental elements as part of the poem's decolonial stance and aesthetic. "ellos serán tus herederos," (21) the rivers as heirs of the debt signals the environment as the last bastion and victim of colonial debt exploitation.

> esta vez decides adelantarte.
>
> recorres todo puerto rico como un espectro.

agarras puñales de lo que sea:

sombrillas de gasolinera, piedra caliza,

actas de nacimiento, tiendas quebradas,

etc. etc. etc (22).

"recorres todo puerto rico como un espectro" is an allusion to the famous opening line of Marx's and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*: "[a] specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism" (14). The allusion shifts Marxist thought from Europe to a US colony, a decolonial move that signals the absence of an analysis of colonialism or race in Marxist thought, while still invoking his presence. The next verses contain yet another list, this one of objects the speaker finds to offer as repayment: gas station umbrellas, limestone, birth certificates, shutdown shops. This seemingly random list of objects conjures an image of ruins—a collection of broken objects which brought together evoke the landscape of Puerto Rico's crisis and its collapsing infrastructure.

vuelves al banco con tu isla tan densamente ingerida

que toses semáforos y entierros y dices

he aquí todo lo que cabe

entre el mar caribe y el atlántico norte.

he aquí: mi imaginario (22).

The specter takes on a monstrous quality, and the image of ingesting the entire island and the coughing up of stoplights and funerals invokes a necropolitical landscape that eerily foreshadows Hurricane Maria, which took place after the publication of this poem. The last line of the stanza, which offers the speaker's 'imaginary' as debt payment, speaks to the existential and imaginative death of colonization, which echoes the social death Pietri names in *Puerto Rican Obituary*, as I

discuss below. It is also a dimension of the necropolitical: debt and colonialism take up the entirety of the space of social struggle, reducing the imaginative capacity for the possibilities of life outside debt colonialism. This is yet another way the temporality of debt is revealed: its thrust into the past precludes engagement with the future. It also underscores the belief that "[c]oloniality posits a world to the measure of colonial violence at the level of power, being, knowledge, and sensing" (Zambrana 13) as has been articulated by the decolonial thought of Sylvia Wynter, Maria Lugones, Anibal Quijano, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

pero te dicen

debes la nada.

tu cuenta tiene un balance negativo.

A cambio de esta deuda sólo aceptamos chaquetas,

pero esto sí que no lo tienes

porque casi nunca hace frío

en puerto rico (Salas Rivera 22).

The hyperbolic crescendo of the creditor's increasingly unrealistic demands contrasts the tone's calculated bureaucracy—the transactional register of the bank teller. Hyperbole reaches its peak when the speaker declares 'you owe nothingness,' which also satirically makes it clear that the violence of debt is not about exchange or mathematics but about the power to keep subjugated (Graeber *Debt*).

digamos que vas hasta filadelfia

a buscar las chaquetas que necesitan

las abuelas, las angelías, el rio maunabo, etc.

trabajas duro, buscas una licencia con dirección renovada,

compras tres cuatro, quinientas chaquetas,

vas a la sucursal local y dices

aquí las tengo.

quisiera pagar aquella deuda.

pero sin mirar te contestan

aquí en fili no aceptamos chaquetas (Salas Rivera 22-23).

The allusion to coats as a commodity foreign to the islands' needs not only plays on the ironies of debt's hyperbolic demands but also centers the role of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the debt crisis. The speaker's travel to 'filadelfia' in search of the commodity needed to free their community mirrors the archetypical migration story of hard work as means of achieving prosperity. According to the logic of the poem, it is only via US migration that the speaker has access to the wealth required to free themselves from the bondage of indebtedness. The 'goods' previously offered as debt repayment had the effect of decimating the islands in their physical, natural, and emotional infrastructure, but still produced nothing 'of value' for the creditor: not even the annihilation of the islands was enough. In the line 'tres cuatro quinientas chaquetas' the lack of commas between the numbers and the jump from four to five hundred have the effect of exhausting the reader. Still, the bank's bureaucracy (and here the 'sin mirar te contestan' is key to bureaucratic coldness of the creditor, which contrasts with the increasing exhaustion of the labor and stress of the debtor) refuses to accept payment, on the grounds that in filadelfia, where coats are common, they are not accepted payment either. This is the seventh rejection by the creditor in the poem's fifteen stanzas, and there is a Kafkaesque weariness to the perpetuation of the rejections. Here the poem reaches a climax, the reader can feel the exhaustion and confinement it produces. This weariness mimics the affective reaction to the finance and

government discourse on debt, which also produces violence cloaked under mathematical detachment, a violence that strips the debtors of their livelihood without and increases over the years without any apparent way out.

supongamos que en la caja de pasteles
le envías las chaquetas a tu madre
con una notita que lee
pago: deuda de puerto rico,
y mami (tras decodificar tu letra) carga
la caja hasta la sucursal del banco popular, el caribe hilton bancario o el
loquesea bank, donde la miran mal y le indican
—antes de que puedan decir palabra alguna—
para entregar chaquetas, utilice la fila número tres.

imagínate que es una fila larga, larguísima, casi interminable,
una fila de 50 años (23).

In the last stanza, the diasporic trope continues with the speaker's sending a remittance, a 'caja de pasteles,' referring to the Puerto Rican culinary delicacy that is often sent to nostalgic diasporic Puerto Ricans from the islands. It is used to send the coats 'necessary' for debt repayment. The image of the physical labor employed by the speaker's mother hauling the coats to the bank again evokes the feeling of weariness and the physical toll of indebtedness. The confluence of banco popular, caribe hilton and "whatever bank" suggests the interchangeability and thus inherent corruption of financial/colonial institutions, which I discuss further in the next chapter. There the mother is again subject to abuse: "where they give her a look and—before she

can say a word" is sent to stand in yet another different line, again referencing Kafkaesque bureaucracy. The presence of the mother bookends the poem's first and last stanzas, suggesting the intergenerational and inherited transference of colonial indebtedness. The last line of the poem seals the perpetuating nature of colonial indebtedness, suggesting a circular temporality that subverts the notion of teleological progress. The poem ends where it begins, with fifty years of labor/debt not being enough, in a "fila de 50 años" (23).

Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary" is perhaps the most canonical literary work of Puerto Rican literature written in English but also a reflection on the role of debt in the lives of Puerto Ricans, written much before today's debt crisis. First published in 1973, the poem's life transcends the page, as it was performed live in the Young Lords' takeover of the Spanish Methodist Church in East Harlem in 1969. At the time, it served as an indictment not only of the social marginalization of Puerto Ricans in the US, but also of the financial and labor conditions Puerto Ricans faced under racial capitalism. "Puerto Rican Obituary" is a poem about debt and death, two main themes in Puerto Rico's current crisis. The poem has recently resurfaced among islands-based Puerto Ricans as prognosis of the current reality—cited often on social media and circulating widely in the present context. This signals the fall from middle class the crisis has signified for many Puerto Ricans, who now identify with diasporic, working-class Puerto Ricans they had long rejected on the grounds of race and class. As Camila Fojas has identified, "stories from the […] middle of the economic order narrate the experience of freefall, a sharp downturn in status and circumstance" (Fojas 9). Crisis is a fall from grace for middle-class society and thus leads to deeper identification with the Othered underclass. This underclass continues to be structured through racial and gender hierarchies, yet broader portions of society now identify with the social space typically reserved for the more marginal sectors of Puerto Rican society,

which includes broad swaths of its diaspora in the US. A contemporary reading of Pietri's poem-anthem can feel prophetic on the islands, but in reality these convergences speak to the cyclical and repeating manifestations of coloniality across time and territory for Puerto Ricans. It shows how the conditions of coloniality endure and the struggle continues despite neoliberal narratives of progress. Island-based identification with the poem also reveals the failure of the Estado Libre Asociado and its promises of modernization. The differences between individual indebtedness and the colossal public debt, the islands and the diaspora, the material conditions of Puerto Ricans stateside in the nineteen-sixties and on both sides of the Atlantic in the twenty-first century only mark the evolving modalities of colonial rule, and Pietri's "Obituary" reminds us of the continuity of struggle and resistance.

In its litany against the conditions of structural marginalization, "Obituary" is framed around the themes of labor, debt, death, and colonial submission. Its chorus "they worked" is repeated six times in the first stanza, and later becomes "all died," marking the affinity between labor and death and signaling them as the most present experiences of Puerto Rican life. It continues:

They worked
They worked
They worked
and they died
They died broke
They died owing
They died never knowing
What the front entrance

of the first national city bank looks like (Pietri 15).

The repetition of "they worked" is a surrealist incantation and an indictment of labor's inability to produce material or spiritual fulfillment. Followed by "they died owing" reveals the link between indebtedness and death so present for Puerto Ricans on the islands today as a longer and an intergenerational legacy for Puerto Ricans in the US. The final lines in this stanza couple indebtedness with estrangement from financial literacy, or a financial lack. As such, indebtedness implies disenfranchisement from financial systems that produce wealth but also involuntary engagement through exploitation.

In his reading of the poem, Israel Reyes notes that the poem's characters: "Juan/Miguel/Milagros/Olga/Manuel" (Pietri 15) "resemble very closely the 'docile' Puerto Ricans Marqués described in his essay '*El puertorriqueño dócil*,' for they labor without complaint or resistance until the day they die" (Reyes 116-117). Pietri invokes the trope of docility and submission, but I disagree with Reyes that he *reproduces* this trope. Rather, I sustain that Pietri is being playful with this historically pervasive trope and is acknowledging it not as an inherent pathology but as a consequence of the systemic forces of oppression that Puerto Ricans endure. His playful activation of colonial tropes also echo Salas-Rivera's allusions to the guilt and sacrifice that debt demands. Pietri's use of irony and "playfully disconcerting hyperbole" (Noel, *In Visible* 18) signals this playfulness that denounces both material oppression and the colonial beliefs that uphold it. Noel speaks about the "tension that has long defined critical reception to the work of Pietri: that between a documentary poetics of community representation and a shape-shifting poetics that has been variously described as surrealist, absurdist, and irreverent" (Noel, In Visible 18).

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today

and will die again tomorrow

passing their bill collectors

on to the next of kin (Pietri15-16).

The invocation of these names refers both to the every-person Puerto Rican but also name and bring to life specific people, countering invisibility, especially throughout their chant-like repetition throughout the poem. The following lines pronounce their deaths, but at the same time their naming brings them repeatedly to life. The temporality of these deaths is the temporality of colonial capitalism: the poem denounces the historical circumstances of colonialism and traces a direct lineage from colonization to the present and future of Puerto Ricans. This is another example of the ways the crisis blurs temporalities by invoking and magnifying the colonial past through the present predicament of indebted crisis, while also laying bare questions about its future. There is no outside from colonial capitalism, not in 1492, in 1898, in 1969 (when the poem was first performed live), or 2017, even if the specific circumstances have morphed. The final lines "passing their bill collectors/on to the next of kin" insist on indebtedness as lineage and inheritance, a theme that reappears in Pastor's and Salas-Rivera's poems discussed above.

Continuing the conversation with literary ancestors, Aurora Levins Morales, one of the most prominent diasporic Puerto Rican feminist poets and thinkers, rewrites "Puerto Rican Obituary" from the vantage point of the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Ecology has always been a central theme in the work of Levins Morales, and in her post recent poetry collection *Silt:*

Prose Poems (2019), she reflects on the role of the climate crisis on the relations between the natural world and those who inhabit them. The poem "Unobituary" is prefaced by a prose text by the author, where she explains the context for this rewriting: watching the news of the post-Hurricane destruction and scarcities from the forest fires of her then-home of California.[34] She invokes rage as the mobilizing affect for her writing, and questions the limits of literature to express or process the conditions she seems to try to earnestly describe: "[n]othing in this poem is made up. People did stand in line all day in the hope of food and water" (Levins Morales 45) and thus an abandonment of the literary artifice in the face of the magnitude of the crisis described: "I didn't polish it into perfection, I hacked it out of the headlines, and threw it like a stone" (45). The poem invokes Pietri's phrase of "all died" followed by images of the "organized abandonment" (Lebrón, *Against*) of the days that followed the Hurricane.

JUAN MIGUEL MILAGROS OLGA MANUEL

All died

Filling out forms that are the only dry things in their lives
Applying in triplicate for a piece of blue plastic
to hang over the ruins. where they lie
parched and sweating, holding each other close,
Proving their eligibility to receive a snack sized bag of Cheetohs
as a first installment on their malnutrition (Levins Morales 45-46).

The second half of the poem mimics the form of Pietri's and shifts from the images of abjection to descriptions of solidarity between people helping each other, echoing Pietri's utopian ending in "Obituary" and articulating the decolonial community also expressed in Salas Rivera.

[34] Levins Morales has since relocated to Puerto Rico.

Miguel shared his generator with the neighbors
so one of them could charge up the machine
that keeps his little girl breathing, and one of them
could keep her insulin cold, and one of them
could print out her manifesto on the power of the people and sunlight
before the diesel ran out (Levins Morales 46).

Nicole Delgado, Ariadna Godreau Aubert, and feminist debt refusal

The first line of Nicole Cecilia Delgado's poem "Obras públicas" states: "La deuda pública no es mía," (Delgado, *Periodo* 50) a clear refusal to accept Puerto Rico's debt as an embodied or personal condition. This decolonial stand dissociates the self from the colonial apparatus of indebtedness, echoing activist slogans such as: 'esa deuda no es nuestra.'[35] Yet the poem proceeds as a serial list of ways that the sovereignty declared is unattainable—that despite declaring personal decolonial sovereignty from indebtedness, the circumstances of life in Puerto Rico ensnare all forms of subjectivity. Followed by the phrase "pero tengo/una deuda innagotable," the list goes:

con la Autoridad de Acueductos y Alcantarillados
(ellos me deben el agua)
con la Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica
(soy amante de la claridad)

[35] This slogan is often seen in Puerto Rican protests against La Junta during the last couple of years (and reaching a peak during the protest of the summer of 2019. A popular protest chant goes "iEsa deuda colonial/no la vamos a pagar!" Protest chants in the increasingly more common and larger protests in Puerto Rico since the passing of PROMESA are a rich source of resistance texts that travel from grassroots organizing into popular consciousness and articulate similar forms of decolonial debt refusal as the poems I read here. Unfortunately I do not have the space to explore this genre and popular source of knowledge production.

con el Departamento de Agricultura

(que no siembra mi alimento)

con la escuela pública

(que no me enseñó inglés)

con la Autoridad de Carreteras

(perforadas de hastío)

con el Internet

(que miente todo el tiempo)

con el celular

(que me roba el tiempo)

con montañas de libros

(que nunca leo) (50).

The items on the list allude to utilities, public goods, and sources of information. The speaker of the poem is indebted to la Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica and la Autoridad de Acueductos y Alcantarillados, public utilities whose services have suffered and prices have soared as a consequence of the debt.[36] The energy company, now privatized under a catastrophic deal, has for the duration of the crisis been a symbol of austerity, as its infrastructure has been weakened by decades of disinvestment which unraveled after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the earthquake swarm of 2019. Yet the parentheticals that follow each item on the list offer critiques on the condition of indebtedness and the broken social contract under Puerto Rico's debt. The poem's speaker also has a debt with the water department, despite the parenthetical clarification that it's the speaker who is owed water. The mention of El Departamento de Agricultura plays with the

[36] The public corporation AEE (Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica) had its own debt to restructure, which ended up in its privatization. See Martínez Mercado.

irony of the lack of local food production in Puerto Rico that results from colonialism. Broadly, the parentheticals gesture at forms in which the social contract is broken: at services and public goods that are currently lacking or deficient in Puerto Rico because of colonial austerity. As such, the poem as a whole challenges the terms of indebtedness and instead argues that, as the activist slogan goes: 'la deuda es con el pueblo,' highlighting the coloniality of debt and posing the 'quién le debe a quién' question. The poem ends: "Estoy en deuda de vacío./A todos voy a pagarle mal" (51). Delgado's poem is an exercise in 'sacar del closet a la deuda,' as Cavallero and Gago have termed it, listing and narrating the speaker's debts with parentheticals that reveal the violence of debt. The speaker suggests that sovereignty from the "public debt" is not enough, that the real terms of indebtedness are a historical and colonial debt with the people trying to live under Puerto Rico's current austerity, which does not deliver on electricity, water, food, education, or leisure. This underlines the notion that the indebted subject cannot be individual but rather collective, since individual sovereignty is null in the face of austerity, and austerity's harm is social. The poem ends in a defiant statement of indocility, "pagar mal," which can be understood as lack of payment but also lack of obedience and allegiance to the colonial-capitalist structures that hinder the possibility of dignified life. "Pagar mal" refuses the tropes of feminized obedience and responsibility placed on colonial indebted subjects.

Ariadna Godreau Aubert's *Las propias: hacia una pedagogía de las endeudadas* (2018) offers further analysis on the outsized impacts of indebtedness on Puerto Rican women, especially Black, queer, and poor women. *Las propias* is a book of essays that considers the impact of the Puerto Rican debt on Puerto Rican daily life from a feminist perspective. The essays theorize indebtedness with a prose that draws from scholarly engagements such as ethnography, sociological analysis, and legal frameworks—the author is a scholar and a

lawyer—but also personal experience and calls to militancy, transcending disciplinary boundaries and frequently engaging in rhetorical strategies that veer towards the poetic. The hybridity of textual forms that make up *Las propias* emulates Anzalduan formal hybridity—Godreau Aubert cites Anzaldúa as inspiration and model. The essay "Nosotras que no nos debemos a nadie: las propias en tiempos de austeridad y deuda pública" is particularly rich in theorization of indebtedness from a feminist positionality. It begins with a reflection on the nature of the essay as discursive strategy, and the difficulties of speaking about debt and austerity: "las palabras […] son insuficientes. En tiempos de deuda y austeridad, también estas andan en crisis. Las palabras son frágiles y apenas sirven para imitar una extensión imposible de las cuerpas que logramos constelar en el mundo material" (54). As for the speaker of Pastor's poem, language is insufficient to express the situation under the current crisis in Puerto Rico. Godreau Aubert adds that language is insufficient because it is not embodied, and the female body (cuerpa) is the main site of struggle and victories. She continues: "los conceptos acaban por ser monstruos perversos, con vocación a la desigualdad y a encuentros imposibles" (54). Concepts are perverse monsters in Godreau Aubert's metaphor, evoking horror and gore in the official discourse of debt and crisis. The evocation of gore lines up with what Graeber describes as "turn[ing] human relations into mathematics" (Graeber, *Debt*14)—the language of finance aims to both neutralize and obscure its violence. Financial discourse uses numbers to appear calculated, intractably objective and factual, and detached, which belies the colonial violence at its center. Finance and debt are gendered as male out of reach to women perceived and stereotyped as emotional in contrast to cerebral number calculations, but who also end up suffering a disproportionate majority of the harm these financial models produce.

"Desde este Puerto Rico endeudado, articular un concepto sobre otro es también elegir el modo de ubicar el poder colonial y de administrar la culpa de las endeudadas" (Godreau Aubert 54). Here, Godreau Aubert suggests that in Puerto Rico's specific context, debt replaces the long-standing issue of colonialism with that of indebtedness as an act of naming, thus likening both phenomena as one. She points to the strategic use of indebtedness by the state to obscure colonialism and its own responsibility in creating indebtedness, holding the people—who had no power over the debt creation—responsible for the sacrifices of debt repayment.

Godreau Aubert goes on: "Es entonces una práctica política moldear [las palabras]" (54). This statement circles back to Pastor's poem, where the brokenness of language—and in the poem also of the debt itself—is a central theme. She also refers to Lima's poem quoted and referenced in Pastor's epigraph. The reference shows a different sort of indebtedness of this generation's thinkers to the prominent work of Lima, and it also illustrates the convergence between poetry and theory. Poetry is situated as an independent mode of knowledge production that is not complementary or subordinate to theory, but a form of theory in itself.

The reference to Lima is expanded in a long footnote that is itself a quasi-poetic meditation, a good example of the way Godreau Aubert's text transcends any classifiable writing genre. From the footnote:

> En torno a la verdad, el poeta puertorriqueño José María Lima escribió que decirla en pedacitos es una forma de decirla también. […] Aludir al tiempo roto que nos ocupa vivir a quienes nacimos y vivimos en la crisis no es una nota marginal sobre la fragmentación social (55).

This is a meta-comment on the form of the text, alluding to her footnote (form) to comment on the temporality of crisis as not a marginal (foot) note on social fragmentation. Godreau Aubert

employs a wide range of rhetorical devices and word play, which steers the essay away from the academic tone, despite it being composed of rigorous academic arguments about the temporality of crisis, the racial and gender hierarchies of debt, and the colonial nature of finance capitalism. The piece's rhetorical richness also likens it to the poems I examine in this chapter, placing them on equal grounds as theoretical reflections on indebtedness and coloniality. I am not, however, trying to suggest that Godreau Aubert's text is *less* academic because or despite its formal complexity. Much in the tradition of Women of Color Feminisms, Third World Feminisms, and Latina Feminisms founded by the likes of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Móraga, the text swiftly combines lived experience with rigorous research and theoretical reflection in a way that defies categorization. Beyond form, the comment on the temporality of crisis as 'social fragmentation' speaks to the embodied experience of crisis on the islands: the way the increased poverty of austerity measures, neglected infrastructure and its many social consequences produce a sense of brokenness described in Pastor's poem and Lima's refrain. The footnote continues: "Vivir en austeridad es también subsistir en pedacitos, a saltitos, con palabras robadas y que nunca dicen lo que deberían decir. Aun así, no podemos abandonar el hallazgo, el movimiento, la voz" (55). This sentence is another attempt to describe the embodied feeling that austerity produces. Austerity, as product of debt, is a form of slow violence, which Rob Nixon states "complicate[s] conventional assumptions about violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" (Nixon 3). As such, Godreau Aubert's (and Pastor's) imagery of brokenness, and naming of words that 'never say what they should say' followed by the allusion to movement and voice suggests that the word austerity is ill-fitted in describing the violence it exerts and belies. The word austerity derives from the Old French "austerite," defined as "cruelty" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*) and even though in the present it

also describes cruelty, its normalization in financial and government discourse has served to purge it from the weight of visible or spectacular violence connoted, for example, in the words Hurricane, or catastrophe. The call to insist on the embodied—movement and voice—is a bet on embodied experience as resistance to the slow violence of debt and financial discourse. The body, and Godreau highlights, the poor, Black, queer, and female body, is the major target of this unseen violence and thus the primary site for resistance to it. Godreau Aubert's text tries to understand the present material reality of indebtedness, while acknowledging that nothing is really owed: "Este escrito es un intento. Es sobre nos/otras viviendo un país en deuda, a sabiendas de que no nos debemos a nadie" (57). Godreau changes the terms of 'who owes what to whom' into 'we owe ourselves to no one' spoken from a collective feminist ethic that refuses indebtedness both materially and morally. This statement aims to emancipate women from the guilt of indebtedness, the material weight of austerity, but also of the idea that women's value stems from their capacity to procreate and care—our roles as mothers, wives, sisters, always caretakers.

One of the most striking rhetorical images in the essay is the personification of blame as female: "La culpa, en este país, o en cualquier otro, nunca es huérfana. Es pobre, negra, y mujer" (65). The guilt and responsibility that debt places on indebted subjects varies according to one's place in racial and gender hierarchies, making Black women the biggest target of debt's violence. The personification also illustrates the close association between indebted guilt and feminized guilt. Godreau Aubert explains:

> El mercado y los bonistas establecen los parámetros de cumplimiento y obligación de la obligación. Un país empeña su palabra cuando entra en un contrato de emisión de deuda. Ese mismo país falla a su responsabilidad—un deber

> metapatríotico/financiero/internacional—cuando no paga según lo acordado. La gente es responsable de ajustarse—o atenerse—a las medidas de austeridad que permitirán cumplir. […] La culpa, que es la otra cara del endeudamiento, se traduce en discursos y prácticas comunes sobre la irresponsabilidad y la vocación al fracaso, asume cuerpos e identidades específicas, locales, en la barriada, en el residencial (65).

This breakdown of how blame relates to debt shows how the trope of responsibility travels from abstraction and decisions made between financial markets and state officials into the spaces and bodies of poor and Black women. The vehicle for this transition is blame and responsibility, which discursively shifts from those in power to the entirety of the "imagined community," (Anderson) down to the pathological failure of the most marginalized, who also pay the highest price of the material consequences austerity brings.

Chapter 3: On Labor and Laziness: El Gran Combo, El Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, and Decolonial Time

"woke up this morning
feeling excellent,
picked up the telephone
dialed the number of
my equal opportunity employer
to inform him I will not
be into work today
Are you feeling sick?
the boss asked me
No Sir I replied:
I am feeling too good
to report to work today,
if I feel sick tomorrow
I will come in early"
-Pedro Pietri, Telephone Booth (number 905 ½)

My mother worked as a supervisor for a government office in 1970s Puerto Rico. She supervised a team of employees that reached out to youth in rural communities and enrolled

them in summer jobs. One day on the job, she encountered two of the employees she supervised —also acquaintances from her small town—sitting under a tree and drinking beers. It was her job to scold them for not working. She recalls doing the best she could, but in reality she found the situation hilarious and appealing. “I would have preferred to laugh it off and even join them- they looked like they were having fun!” she says. She mustered a half-hearted lecture for them, but did not take the disciplinary actions her role required she take, and instead let them off the hook. My mother is a conservative woman, generally fearful of institutions and rules. Yet she was tempted to sit down and drink with her colleagues in the middle of the workday, and was amused rather than upset by their transgression. She identified with them and showed solidarity rather than exercising authority over them. The government program she worked for was tasked with promoting work among youth, but this doesn’t figure in the story as important. Why? What would drive her to be tempted by leisure over disciplinary labor? But also, why is this considered a transgression?

Work has for centuries organized our lives: individually, it structures our time throughout the day and lifetime, and, at least in the last few decades, it offers many a sense of existential purpose. Globally, labor produces resources and thus wealth, and most workers’ lives are organized around the concept of producing wealth for others. We know from Karl Marx that under capitalism, labor also produces alienation for the worker. In Puerto Rico, where colonization ensured that labor production enriched foreign capital—first through slavery and then through haphazard attempts at economic development, work has meant something different than in the Western centers of power that dictated the social and material value of work. Thus, for many Puerto Ricans, work does not carry as much weight as in the West, as my mother’s anecdote shows. I want to highlight the cultural attitude of celebrating leisure and resisting

colonially imposed work ethics. Colonial history has characterized Puerto Ricans as lazy, pathologically inept for productive work, lacking self-discipline and entrepreneurship. In this chapter, I argue that Puerto Rican attitudes towards labor instead are a form of decolonial subversion of Western, capitalist conceptions of labor and productivity. I also argue that Puerto Rico's relation to the global labor market produces a sense of time that is itself decolonial, and that these subversions are a form of marronage.[37]

During the debt crisis, this colonial trope of blaming inherent Puerto Rican laziness for the crisis—which has a long history I will trace— is once again on the rise. The objects I will examine in this chapter all push back against this trend and articulate notions of decolonial refusal to the norms of productivity and the belief that labor is innately redemptive. I will begin with a reading of El Gran Combo's song "Y no hago más ná," (1983) a salsa anthem that celebrates leisure. Then I will move on to tracing the belief that Puerto Ricans are lazy across centuries of policy and governmental discourse, followed by an examination of Banco Popular de Puerto Rico's media campaign to re-write El Gran Combo's song in a propagandistic effort to 'deal with' laziness and impose capitalistic work values that blamed Puerto Ricans' purported laziness for the debt crisis. I close with a reading of Ruben Ramos Colón's poem "Propuesta de financiamiento para el plan de no hacer nada" as a contemporary rendering of El Gran Combo's original song and critique of both labor and philanthropy under neoliberalism.

Listening on Decolonial Time

[37] I use Neil Robert's definition of marronage as flight, in which: "heretical, non- state actors construct a clandestine series of hidden transcripts in opposition to the zones of governance and appropriation intrinsic to existing state regimes of slavery. Maroons do so by cultivating freedom on their own terms within a demarcated social space that allows for the enactment of subversive speech acts, gestures, and social practices antithetical to the ideals of enslaving agents." (5)

Throughout this dissertation, I have showed how the crisis has altered the sense of time: through the invocation of the US colonial past in *Hamilton*, the historical reckoning (Zambrana) that indebtedness demands, and the tension between future expectations (such as in the cynically named PROMESA law, and the promise to pay) and lack of future brought on by austerity. In the first chapter, we saw how Lin-Manuel Miranda invoked the colonial past of the US and the Caribbean at the service of Puerto Rico's purported future prosperity while lobbying for policy that ensured its impossibility. In the second chapter, the poems studied, especially Salas Rivera's "coats are not exchanged for coats" and Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary," illustrated the temporality of indebtedness, where the colonial past is ever-present and forecloses possible futures. In this chapter, I propose the concept of decolonial time as a maroon temporality of liberation that relies on leisure and the refusal of colonial and capitalist work demands.

El Gran Combo's "Y no hago más ná," part of their 1983 album "La Universidad de La Salsa," sings the praises of leisure and a life of non-work. El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico is one of the world's most established and cherished salsa orchestras. It was founded in 1962 by Rafael Ithier, a member of Cortijo y su Combo, after their rupture, which was partly due to Ismael Rivera's and Rafael Cortijo's drug arrest.[38] Most of the members of Cortijo y su Combo regrouped under the new name and Ithier's leadership, continuing the legacy of one of the most innovative Afro-Caribbean music ensembles to this day. Marisol Berrios and Shannon Dudley trace a musical geography of Santurce and the centrality of Afro-diasporic aesthetics and communities to Cortijo, Santurce, and thus also El Gran Combo. San Mateo de Cangrejos was founded as a community of free blacks dating back to the 1600s which served as a hub for

[38] Ismael Rivera's arrest is mentioned in passing in the Berrios and Dudley article, but it fails to acknowledge how the experience of incarceration exists in a continuum of the history of enslavement, suppression of Blackness, and marronage in Santurce that the authors trace.

marronage through the eighteenth century and saw big waves of intra-Caribbean migration through the nineteenth century, (Berrios & Dudley 2008) making it a Black Caribbean maroon community. If modernity and capitalism were not easily imposed on Puerto Rican society, even less so in this outpost of formerly enslaved and free Black communities of Cangrejos. Despite undergoing many changes in lineup throughout its long history, El Gran Combo is an orchestra rooted in Blackness, from its origins to this day. This is crucial to the analysis of the song's composition and production.

I thus propose reading "Y no hago más ná" as a maroon expression of liberation. A celebration of Puerto Ricans' generally uncomfortable positioning in the global labor market and consequent refusal to adhere to its timeline, the song is also a meditation on time outside the dictates of capitalism that require us all to spend most of our time at work, and the possibilities that the flight or refusal from the temporality of work offer. The song's lyrics follow the daily routine of its subject—a Puerto Rican everyman who celebrates the pleasures of not having to work.

Yo me levanto por la mañana
Me doy un baño y me perfumo
Me como un buen desayuno
Y no hago más na', más na'

Después yo leo la prensa
Yo leo hasta las esquelas
O me pongo a ver novelas
Y no hago más na', más na'

A la hora de las doce

Yo me como un buen almuerzo

De arroz con habichuelas

Y carne guisa, y no hago más na'

Después me voy a la hamaca

A dormir una siestita

Y a veces duermo dos horas

Y a veces más, y no hago más na'

Y me levanto como a las tres

Y me tomo un buen café

Me fumo un cigarillito con mi guitarra

Y me pongo a cantar

A la la, a la la, a la la lara la lara

Y a la hora de la comida

Me prepara mi mujer

Un bistec con papas fritas

Con ensalada y mil cosas más

Me lo mango y no hago más na'

Luego me voy al balcón

Cual si fuera un gran señor

A mecerme en el sillón

Con mi mujer a platicar

A larara la la

¡Ay!, cuando se me pega el sueño

Enseguidita me voy a acostar

Y duermo hasta por la mañana

Y no hago más na', más na' (García)[39]

The speaker of the song recounts his daily routine in detail, using every stanza to reiterate the leisure afforded to him by his lack of work. The biggest celebration of the song seems to be how much time the subject has: it introduces a temporality of leisure, or laziness—decolonial time. These slow activities are alternated with the repetition of the phrase that gives the song its chorus: "y no hago más ná:" doing nothing. The temporality of the song is slow, both rhythmically and in the situation of its lyrics. His leisure is taken up by the arts: playing a guitar, singing, watching telenovelas, reading the newspaper, a cleanliness ritual, and napping on a hammock. Today we call these things self-care.

The subject also tells of the culinary indulgences he partakes in throughout the day— the fact that he can feed himself and find sustenance without having to work. Every other stanza focuses on eating as part of the daily routine: breakfast, lunch, coffee time, and dinner are all described in detail, a list of Puerto Rican culinary staples. The mentions of food have various functions: they underscore sustenance as the main reason for which individuals would need to

[39] I wake up in the morning/take a nice shower/eat a nice breakfast/and I don't do nothin' else/After that I read the papers/Even the obituaries/Or I watch a soap opera/and I don't do nothin' else/At noon/I have a nice lunch/Rice and beans/with stewed meat and I don't do nothin' else/Then off to the hammock/to take a little nap/I sometimes sleep two hours/Sometimes more and I don't do nothin' else/I get up at around 3/And I drink some nice coffee/I smoke a little cigarette with my guitar/and I sing some tunes/A la la, a la la, a la lara la lara/And at supper time/My wife makes me/A beefsteak with fries/A little salad and a bunch of other things/I eat it and I don't do nothin' else/After that I sit in the porch/as if I were a great lord/Rocking on my chair/and chatting with my wife/A larara la la/Oh! And when I get sleepy/I quickly go off to bed/I sleep until morning/And I don't do nothin' else (García, my translation).

work, and they evoke the long relation between welfare/food stamps and labor in Puerto Rican history. In *Sobrevivencia, pobreza y 'mantengo,'* Linda Colón outlines the links between the US welfare system in Puerto Rico and conceptions of poverty. She posits U.S. welfare assistance as a backbone of the colonial economy, a shallow patch-on that tries to disguise the deep social inequality and structural poverty that has been created by the colonial status: "[P]ara los grupos sociales más vulnerables, los fondos federales asistenciales representan la posibilidad de escapar al hambre que muchos recuerdan claramente, pero no se produce la capacidad de salir de la pobreza" (Colón 40). 'Fondos federales,' or federal funds, are the colloquial name for this welfare system, which has become the twentieth century incarnation of a long history of surveillance and criminalization of the disadvantaged, as I will show in the following section. Being a buffer for hunger for many creates an outsized situation of dependency and criminalization, because people who use these funds are intimidated and surveilled into 'deserving' them. These federal funds originate in New Deal era reforms that were originally liberal, but that under neoliberalism increasingly criminalize those who depend on them. In Puerto Rico, the colloquial terms of 'mantengo' and 'mantenidos' appeared to stigmatize welfare recipients, activating the pathological laziness to blame people for preferring welfare over work. In explaining the concept, Colón tells us:

> En el 'mantengo,' viene implícito el insulto y la incapacidad adjudicada a quien lo recibe. En el 'mantengo,' también se hace cuerpo la sujeción colonial y se les recuerda mensualmente a las masas que sin el gobierno estadounidense no comen. Para algunas personas, obtener estas ayudas ha pasado a ser un elemento 'natural' de la sobrevivencia, lo aceptan e incluso lo promueven como estilo de vida y no esperan, ni luchan por mucho más (42).

This last part of the quote is thematized in "Y no hago más ná." The subject is the proverbial 'mantenido'; he celebrates not having to work and the delicious food he still gets to eat.[40] As Colón outlines, this becomes part of this identity and lifestyle. The song is playfully humorous, and it becomes important here to locate the source and target of that humor.

Mocking 'mantenidos' has long been an unfortunate staple of Puerto Rican popular culture, a cultural extension of the long history of stigmatization. Is El Gran Combo mocking the subject of the song? Or are they celebrating him, mocking instead the middle-class moral panic against welfare recipients and offering an admitting portrait of the decolonial wisdom of the 'mantenido'? The humor that characterizes their song lyrics keeps the reading purposefully ambiguous, and perhaps somewhere between the tension of these two possibilities. In her discussion of the song, Puerto Rican historian and queer cultural theorist Mabel Rodriguez Centeno declares that "the original song is not an ode to nonwork. It is a mockery that seeks to ridicule a man that eats without working who spends all day inside the domestic space and who is 'maintained' by his wife and the state(welfare)" (cited in Zambrana 128). Generally, Rodríguez Centeno's reading and treatment of laziness is superb, but I disagree with her on this. I argue that there is at least an ambiguous celebration of leisure in the song expressed in the playful and opaque humor that characterizes El Gran Combo. Further, even if mockery was the original intent, it matters little to the song's afterlife, reception, and the cultural work it does today. I turn to an analysis of its reception rather than authorial intent for clues into the cultural significance of this song for Puerto Rican culture.

[40] It is remarkable and deserves further attention that all the food mentioned in the song, and thus purchased with US federal funds, is strongly Puerto Rican, and that despite the noted growth in US junk food consumption observed by Colón in her analysis, there is widespread resistance on the islands to letting go of traditional Puerto Rican foodways.

The song undoubtedly deserves critique, most glaringly of its patriarchal upholding of gendered labor. The speaker is patriarchal, his celebrated lack of work is made possible only because his wife cooks his meals for him, and presumably performs all other domestic tasks and reproductive labor required for the upkeep of his leisure.

¡Oigan!, yo nunca he doblado el lomo
Y no pierdan su tiempo, no voy a cambiar, ¡qué va!
(Qué bueno es vivir así, comiendo y sin trabajar)
Señores, si yo estoy declarado en huelga, ¡si!
¡Mi mujer que me mantenga! ¿Oíste?
(Qué bueno es vivir así, comiendo y sin trabajar)
Qué bueno, qué bueno, qué bueno
Qué bueno es vivir la vida
¡Comiendo, durmiendo y no haciendo na'!

Oiga compay, ¿usted sabe lo que es estar en un sillón mece que te mece?
Esperando que lleguen los cupones, welfare y el seguro social
¡Así cualquiera!

Recibiendo la pensión por loco
De loco yo no tengo na', ¡listo que soy!
(Qué bueno es vivir así, comiendo y sin trabajar)
Qué bueno
Tráeme un plato de mondongo
Arroz, habichuela y carne guisa, para empezar
(Qué bueno es vivir así, comiendo y sin trabajar)

¿Quién trabajara? ¿Quién, yo?

Búscate a otro, yo ya hice lo que iba a hacer, mijo[41]

In this final part of the song, which includes the soneo (improvisational call and response), the subject becomes more overtly satirical, and lines such as "esperando que lleguen los cupones, welfare, y el seguro social/asi cualquiera" show there is definitely an element of mockery on the subject of the 'mantenidos' and welfare culture, but also enough opacity to also express admiration for the subject. The line "recibiendo la pensión por loco," followed by "the loco yo no tengo ná, listo que soy!" show the trickster of El Gran Combo's humor, and in the pointed outsmarting of, in this case, the colonial military system, an expression of marronage. The improvisational structure of soneo itself also embodies the movement and flight of marronage, fleeting instances of liberation that allow for ludic double entendres and multiple significations. The song's performance reveals a playful resistance to any scripted meanings in the lyrics.

In Puerto Rico, 1.5 million residents, or half of the population, rely on food stamps ("La mitad"). The half of the population that does not—currently a downtrodden middle-class aiming to mark their respectability within working society—needs to look down upon the one that does to assert its 'superior' place by reproducing the 'mantenido' stereotype. The crisis' austerity measures have meant a fall from the middle-class and thus a heightening of tensions between these two groups, as the material indicators of their separation are smaller than ever, if they exist at all. The stereotype is reproduced in the song, but if we consider El Gran Combo's own background and cultural role as harbingers of the working class, their penchant for humor, and

[41] "Listen! I've never folded my spine/And don't waste your time, I'll never change, of course!/(It's so good to live like this/eating without having to work/Gentlemen! I'm on strike, yes!/Let my wife support me, you hear?/It's so good to live this life/Eating, sleeping, and doing nothin'!/Listen man, you know how good it is to sit on a rocking chair/Waiting for the welfare benefits and social security money/Anyone can do that!/Receiving a pension because I'm crazy!/Listen, I'm not really crazy, I'm just clever!" (García, my translation).

the song's wide acceptance with Puerto Rican audiences, we can observe a shift away from mockery that turns laziness into a form of decolonial subversion.

In terms of the song's reception, Frances Aparicio coined the phrase "listening woman" to address the re-signifying processes and practices of female Latina audiences of patriarchal salsa music, reminding us that "in the context of popular music, […] reception […] partakes in signifying practices through both individual and collective acts of listening, singing, and dancing" (*Listening to Salsa* 121). Establishing salsa as "male-dominated and positioned as a commodity of a capitalist superstructure" (123) Aparicio notes the patriarchal and capitalist entanglements of salsa only to remind us of the many "extratextual elements" that produce meaning as "plural discursive sites" that form webs of signification in salsa music: "when we listen to lyrics, we listen to multiple articulations of desire and conflict that must be documented" (124). "Y no hago más ná" is part of the canonical salsa corpus that Aparicio refers to and thus subject to resignifications not only in terms of gender. As I have mentioned earlier, El Gran Combo is mainly composed of Black musicians from the former maroon enclave of Santurce. They are oppositional subjects in terms of race and class. Regarding the "plural ideological sites" of salsa music, Aparicio states:

> Given the sociohistorical development of this music, its antecedents in folklore and in black counterplantation culture, and its strong contestatory stance on classism and racism, its ideological value of resistance and oppositionality continues from its origins to the present (77).

The ambivalence of the song's posture is part of its maroon aesthetics, as this type of ambiguous humor characterizes the group's repertoire. I also propose that, in the same way Aparicio's "listening woman" could appropriate dominant discourses and re-signify them through discursive

and performative practices to make them sites of liberation, one can listen decolonially to "Y no hago más ná". Sandra Ruiz's concept of colonial time "is marked by a common endurance of death that infiltrates the center of the subject's call to life" (2). Following this definition, the decolonial listener thus enacts moments of fleeting liberation in marronage that transcend this 'endurance of death.' This listening subject has imbued its original meaning to become an anthem to the pleasure of leisure and resistance to labor. In this case, Aparicio's concept of "listening woman" may be adapted to speak to how audiences have 'listened decolonially,' and transformed it into a site of liberatory pleasure that appropriates the pathological notion of the lazy Puerto Rican.

A Long History of Laziness

Mabel Rodríguez Centeno devotes her scholarly work to challenging the social value of work and proposing laziness as a subversion of the Western, capitalist, and Christian norms that equate work with self-worth. In "Las perezas insulares," Rodríguez Centeno declares:

> El trabajo es un valor supremo, de hecho para el cristianismo romano es una de las siete virtudes. En el trabajo parecería descansar toda la honestidad, toda la dignidad. El trabajo honrado es la virtud del pobre porque lo aleja de los vicios y del mal. Desde la ética del trabajo, la sola mención de la vagancia intranquiliza lo moral (reclamando pecado), desequilibra lo material (anunciando pobreza y atraso), agita lo social (implicando peligrosidad) y desazona lo político (imposibilitando progresos). Mientras que el trabajo es el fundamento modernizador anunciando desarrollo y civilización, la vagancia

> amenaza con dilaciones y barbaries. Está visto que la holgazanería supone "pobreza", que la desidia imposibilita el progreso (material y moral) ("Perezas").

This powerful introduction reveals the subversive power of challenging the social, political, and moral value that we assign to work. Rodríguez Centeno challenges the equation of work with dignity, personhood, prosperity, responsibility, and almost all positive societal values. The article evidences the power bestowed to such discourses and their central presence in historical and present assumptions on self-worth. It traces the belief that Puerto Ricans were inherently lazy and in need of being taught the value of work as redemptive by Spanish and US colonial authorities throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. She quotes Spanish and American governors who described Puerto Ricans as inherently lazy and thus in need of disciplinary intervention that would guide them towards the prosperity found in work. In 1778, land was offered only to "diligent" farmers and taken away from "lazy" ones. In 1803, "los vagos"[42] were to be persecuted along with thieves for their "misconduct" and in 1805 the Spanish governor Toribio Montes built a correctional center for the lazy (Rodríguez Centeno "Perezas"). The second half of the nineteenth century saw the infamous "ley de la libreta," where workers were forced to carry a notebook documenting their work activity in behavior, a post-slavery surveillance and exploitation tactic also coated in the language of laziness prevention.

Later in her text, Rodríguez Centeno continues:

> [l]as bases mismas de la ética del trabajo que deplora (y desprecia) la vagancia, coincidieron temporal y lógicamente con el nacimiento del progreso y la civilización,

[42] It is worth noting that a second definition of vago in the Diccionario de la real academia Española refers to the nomadic connotation of the word: "que anda de una parte a otra, sin detenerse en ningún lugar," linking its main meaning with movement, which suggests marronage.

> trilogía cimera de la "luz" occidental. Desde allí, y para toda la modernidad, la pereza es sinónimo de atraso y de barbarie ("Perezas").

This links the social role of work to the Enlightment's civilizatory idea. The decolonial thought of Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and Nelson Maldonado Torres reminds us that this is part of the epistemic imposition of Western thought on the Americas and the obliteration of Native/Black/Other forms of being, or what Sylvia Wynter calls the "coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom" (Wynter 2003). Following these decolonial arguments, we can conclude that beliefs about work were part and parcel of the "modernity/coloniality" (Mignolo) structure and thus, that refusal to adhere to such ideals is a challenge to the coloniality of being.[43]

Silvia Álvarez Curbelo quotes Kant answering the question of 'what is the Enlightenment?' with the phrase "[l]a Ilustración es la salida del hombre de su minoría de edad." (quoted in Álvarez Curbelo 28). This equation of Enlightment with adulthood is a recurring trope of Western thought, part of a binomial relationship that built Western, White man as the adult, civilized and enterprising counterpart to his savage, lazy, childlike Other. In his groundbreaking book *Bullshit Jobs: The Rise of Pointless Work and What We Can Do About It,* (2018) David Graeber elegantly traces our beliefs in the social value of work and finds that the penchant to imbue labor with existential meaning dates back to when it was perceived, through apprenticeship, as the Western dominant work model, as man's entry into adulthood. Graeber tells us that historically, "the poor were seen as frustrated adolescents. Work—and specifically,

[43] Speaking about the concept of the coloniality of being, Nelson Maldonado-Torres says: "The idea was that colonial relations of power left profound marked not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge, and the economy, but on the general understanding of being as well. And, while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with the impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language." (242)

paid labor under the eye of a master—had traditionally been the means by which such adolescents learned how to be proper, disciplined, self-contained adults" (228). The Western construction of work as a virtue also aided the construction of an infantilized and lazy other. While this Other may broadly be identified as a non-Western, colonized subject, locating its specificity inevitably leads us to Blackness, a point I will come back to later.

The Spanish and US colonial insistence of inherent Puerto Rican laziness was part of the process of epistemic colonization, and the refusal to adhere to these norms and beliefs is a decolonial form of marronage, of resisting the coloniality of being. Yet they are also grounded in Puerto Rico's material and localized economic reality. The economic model of subsistence farming worked well for the peasant class, and thus their insertion into the industrial, capitalist logic of work was not successful. Albeit with internal differences, both Spanish and US colonial authorities believed that "los problemas de la pobreza son un derivado de la incapacidad individual de integrarse al mercado de trabajo y consumo" (Rodriguez Centeno, "Perezas"). Yet the problem was not individuals, of course. The racist depiction of Puerto Ricans as inherently lazy belies the structural economic and political forces that shaped the realities of labor in the islands. In *Historia económica de Puerto Rico*, James Dietz notes:

> [l]a razón para la llamada escasez de mano de obra, y la fuente de conflicto resultante, era que un jornalero o un campesino jornalero o un semi-campesino, no tenía que trabajar diaria y arduamente para obtener lo que necesitaba para vivir. En su "Memoria" de 1765, O'Reilly escribió: "Con cinco días de trabajo tiene una familia plátanos para todo el año. Con esto, la leche de vacas, algún casabe, boniatos y frutas silvestres, están contentísimos (60-61).

With lives outside the strictures of modernity/coloniality, and a temporality outside of industrial capitalism, Puerto Ricans worked for their sustenance, and thus the disciplining efforts that accompanied the notion of work as self-fulfilling or redemptive did not make sense to peasants and laborers. Dietz continues:

> Como han descubierto los estudiosos de la antropología económica en otras situaciones, el nivel de necesidades en las sociedades precapitalistas o de las personas que no poseen una visión capitalista del mundo, incluso de los que realizan algún trabajo a jornal, es baja, por lo general, con respecto a los medios para satisfacerlas. Como consecuencia, estas personas trabajan sólo lo suficiente para satisfacer estas pocas necesidades y luego pasan la mayor parte de su tiempo ociosos o en otras actividades (60-61).

In her analysis of the belated and haphazard arrival of modernity to Puerto Rico's colonial and insular milieu, scholar Silvia Álvarez Curbelo also reiterates that in the mid nineteenth century, Puerto Rico was not yet inserted into a capitalist economic model,[44] but instead moved from a slavery system that persisted beyond abolition through the 'sistema de la libreta' that based itself on the criminalization of subjects: "El convertir a los jornaleros en clases peligrosas y el considerarlos como sedes naturales de los vicios, la vagancia y la ignorancia, constituirían tópicos reiterados del discurso propietario, del discurso gubernamental y del discurso eclesiástico durante las décadas subsiguientes" (82-83). It dates back then to the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the centers of power: business, religious, and governmental, articulate a discourse that pathologizes subjects as lazy despite upholding a colonial system that could not insert itself into capitalist modernity and produce the conditions

[44] "Una combinación de agricultura autártica y de relaciones de contrabando caracterizaban una economía donde el factor trabajo, como se concibe en las relaciones capitalistas de producción, era prácticamente inexistente. (Álvarez Curbelo 83).

that would have granted stable work for a majority of the population. Álvarez Curbelo attends to the nineteenth century origins of this in relation to Puerto Rico's uncomfortable entry into modernity, while Rodríguez Centeno's work tracks the historical roots of this discourse to speak about the present. The subject of "Y no hago más ná" is thus rooted in this long history of disdain for the lazy, embodying the tension between subversion and reification.

Curbelo speaks of the fear of slave uprisings as a fundamental driver of surveillance (and whitening policies like the Real Cédula de Gracia of 1812). In her analysis of the process of racialization in Puerto Rican popular music, Bárbara I. Abadía-Rexach reminds us that this pathologized Other is Black. Sketching the stereotypical dominantly disseminated images of Black people in Puerto Rico, she cites Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, where Hall states: "[p]opular representations of racial 'difference'…was the subordinate status and 'innate laziness' of blacks—'naturally' born to, and fitted only for, servitude but, at the same time, stubbornly unwilling to labour in ways appropriate to their nature and profitable for their masters…" (Hall 244 cited in Abadía-Rexach 53). I highlight this to locate the subject of mantengo, which is also to say the subject of criminalization, the lazy Puerto Rican subject as (mostly, if not exclusively) Black. Given El Gran Combo's previously mentioned positionality as a Black orchestra from a former maroon enclave, it's easy to see how the band mocked power rather than reinforced it. "Y no hago más ná," then, is an expression of marron flight.

El Banco Popular de Puerto Rico and Today's Lazy Indebted Subject

In the current debt crisis, we witness private centers of powers reactivate the criminalization of workers, this time at the service of the colonial debt. In 2011, el Banco Popular de Puerto Rico (BPPR) funded a re-writing of El Gran Combo's "Y no hago más ná" as part of an advertising campaign. BPPR is Puerto Rico's largest banking institution, with a long history of sponsoring cultural productions and partaking in cultural conversations about national identities, as concerted media strategy to disguise their exploitative presence on the islands.[45] Founded in 1893, the bank marketed itself as an alternative to the usury of private lenders engaged in illegal banking, and it managed to grow to become Puerto Rico's most important banking institution by pursuing a corporate identity rooted in Puerto Rican folklore and patriotism. This branding may be a way for them to disguise that no other private institution profits so much off Puerto Rico and its crisis as BPPR. Amado Martinez Lebrón offers a succinct summary of the bank's hand in the crisis:

> Los banqueros son responsables de nuestra crisis por muchas razones: hipotecas deshonestas, préstamos con intereses leoninos, préstamos estudiantiles, seguros, planes médicos, monopolio en transacciones, tarjetas de crédito impagables, inversiones fraudulentas, privatización […] entre otras; sin embargo, su responsabilidad en nuestra crisis más reciente radica en su especulación con los bonos del ELA, así como con los de sus corporaciones públicas y municipios. Los banqueros, que constituyen uno de los poderes más consistentes detrás de los gobiernos, en contubernio con sus delegados en el Estado, tanto bajo pepedeístas como penepeístas, han negociado las emisiones de bonos para mantener el crecimiento económico artificialmente, y seguir beneficiándose de forma exclusiva del sistema capitalista financiero y colonial.

[45] See Martínez Lebrón for a detailed account of BPPR's history and monopoly of the islands' finances.

The bank is the islands' local main debtor, on the individual levels of mortgages, credit card debt, student debt, health debt, and others. They have also played a key role in the neoliberal turn of Puerto Rico, lending money to the government for infrastructure projects at rates that profit them, and they have lobbied for the privatization of public infrastructure (Carmona Báez). The Carrión family, who founded the bank in the nineteenth century and presides it to this day, is one of the islands' wealthiest and has passed down power patriarchically among generations of Carrións. A Carrión family member was also the first director of the Fiscal Control Board, illustrating the nepotist reach of their not just financial but also political power. Yet all this is slyly disguised behind a public image that makes many Puerto Ricans positively identify with the bank as part of local popular culture. As such, they are much more than a banking institution, but at once the biggest debtor and a cultural actor:

> Banco Popular is an everyday fact of life, present in: salsa festivals and other cultural activities, the Olympic and Pan-American games, community initiatives, ticketing at cinema centers, parks, museums, food and clothes shopping with debit and credit cards, home mortgages, car loans, etc. Banco Popular also has the capacity to whip up sentiments of Puerto Rican pride in its television commercials, showing footage of the industrialization process during the 1940s and 1950s, while sponsoring the internationally renowned Pablo Casals Festival or the national basketball team (Carmona Báez 252).

In *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*, Arlene Dávila argues private interests are as entangled in constructions of Puerto Rican culture as the state.[46] "Dávila's book situates the Instituto de Cultura de Puerto Rico (ICP) as the main institution tasked with outlining

[46] "The debates regarding the use, definition, and representation of Puerto Rican culture as the terrain on which a variety of actors seek to advance and legitimize interests that range from selling products to promoting U.S. statehood and independence" (Dávila 2).

a definition of Puerto Rican culture, but traces the ways that private advertising campaigns and corporate sponsorships also contribute to debates on Puerto Ricanness. Dávila's book was written in 1997, when the foreign tax incentive laws known as Leyes 936 had just been eliminated by then-governor Pedro Rosselló and had not yet been phased out. In the following twenty years, from the vantage point of 2021 and the debt crisis, we have witnessed the way austerity has caused the collapse of the ICP, and how the state can no longer afford to be an actor in shaping cultural identity, at least not in funding it. As neoliberal logic would dictate, we have seen private interests and philanthropy dominate these efforts, with BPPR leading the way. For years, its advertising campaigns have, like many other Dávila documents in her book, attempted to advance definitions of Puerto Rican cultural identity, and make themselves a part of that identity.

BPPR's yearly Christmas Special, a televised production consisting of local music talent that celebrates Puerto Rican musical history, was born in 1993. The date coincided with their recent acquisition of another local bank, thus furthering of their monopoly, and in a preemptive and innovative media campaign that combined Christian religious sentiment with cultural patriotism and included the participation of left-wing songwriters such as El Topo. It is no coincidence that the specials began in the 1990s, a key decade of neoliberal policies in Puerto Rico, the decline in state funding by ICP, the end of the Leyes 936, and the government of Pedro Rosselló. Martinez Lebrón has rightly characterized the specials as a "movida que sin duda terminó fortaleciendo el nacionalismo cultural que ha vendido desde sus inicios y le ha permitido al Banco explotarnos sin consecuencias y quizás hasta con orgullo" (" Banco"). BPPR's attempts to make cultural nationalism part of their corporate identity have worked; their specials are so popular they have become a cultural tradition in itself. They deserve study for their carefully

curated depictions of Puerto Rican folklore, celebration of cherished Boricua composers (Bobby Capó, Pedro Flores, Tite Curet Alonso, Rafael Hernández), poets (Luis Palés Matos), and musicians (Ismael Rivera), and staging of traditions such as parrandas, and lived realities such as the Puerto Rican diaspora. The specials are directed by diverse local talent but maintain an aesthetic that sanitizes and glamorizes mostly reactionary ideas of folk Puerto Ricanness.

In 2011, BPPR launched another unusual and massive media campaign. Called "Echar pa'lante," it consisted of having El Gran Combo re-write "Y no hago más na" and playing it heavily in the local airwaves, accompanied by a music video, billboards, radio, television, and even movie theater spots. The new lyrics attempted to erase the subversive power El Gran Combo's call to maroon flight, laziness, and non-work, replacing them with a neoliberal call to pick oneself up by the bootstrap and get to work as a remedy to the crisis. The campaign might be their mostly overtly propagandistic attempt to regulate behavior, and it was also a damage control strategy that tried to clean BPPR's corporate image in the aftermath of the passing of Law 7 of 2009, a neoliberal stripping of labor protections that resulted in the loss of approximately fifty-seven thousand jobs (Martinez Lebrón). BPPR CEO Richard Carrión, heir of the dynasty that founded the bank, and whose cousin José Carrión III presided the Fiscal Control Board, was a main architect of the law, which was met with mass protests and wide social discontent. BPPR emitted debt with questionable legality that the Board (which includes Carrión) refuses to audit or make public (Cintrón Arbasetti and Valentín Ortíz).

On August 16, 2011, Puerto Rico woke up to the new version of "Y no hago más ná." The music video opens with El Gran Combo founder Rafael Ithier dominating the frame inside a sleek music recording studio, some of the other musicians visible in the background holding their instruments. He speaks into the camera: "Puerto Rico, en el 1962, un grupo de compañeros nos

reunimos, para llevar alegría a los pueblos con nuestra música." The camera cuts to saxophonist Virgil Rivera who adds "eran tiempos dificiles de muchos retos y problemas" to which another member adds "pero nuestro pueblo los venció." Cut to singer Luis Papo Rosario: "lo hicimos juntos, trabajando fuerte" as another continues "con una misión en mente: echar pa'lante." Pianist Willie Sotelo follows: "Hoy, todavía seguimos luchando contra las adversidades que día a día nos trae la vida." Then the camera cuts fast through other members of the group as they all say fragments of "La batalla no se ha perdido. Nuestro Puerto Rico no está pobre de esperanza. Vamos pa'lante, vamos a soñar. ¡Vamos a pensar en grande! Así lo hicimos nosotros en aquel entonces, y lo continuamos haciendo ahora. Tenemos que ser positivos. No esperes que nadie lo haga por ti." Here the camera cuts back to Ither who explains the conceit of the campaign: "Nosotros vamos a reescribir una de nuestras canciones más conocidas y queremos que todos, todos, la canten." After that, the shot widens to show all the group members standing next to their instruments, as they rotely exclaim: "Hagamos que Puerto Rico eche pa'lante!" ("Echar pa'lante")

The challenges they refer to in the speech are presumably the loss of jobs of Law 7, which as I pointed out earlier, BPPR's Richard Carrión helped design. There is a temporal play between allusions to the group's founding in 1962 and the present circumstances of economic crisis. The reference to the islands' structural economic "challenges and problems" makes the statement applicable whether it was pronounced in 2011, 1962, 1918 or 1852. They then turn to the present, where they admit the adversities are ongoing but exhort people to not give up. The phrase "Puerto Rico no está pobre de esperanzas" admits the material poverty of the islands but suggests spiritual motivation, hard work, and a positive attitude can offset these structural conditions. The group members' delivery of the speech is stiff and robotic, which exposes the

disingenuous, corporate, propagandistic intent of the video to the point of bordering on satirical. Yet satirical it is not, the group is accepting the bank's attempt to offer an individualized solution—but implied in this solution is the responsibility and thus, guilt—for Puerto Rico's social and economic misgivings. As such, the speech that frames the song is an apology of sorts for the group's writing of a song that had purportedly further corrupted the lazy subjects and validated their impulses of leisure and flight. The rewriting of the song is evidence of David Graeber's assertion that "whenever there's a crisis, […]there are calls for collective sacrifice. These calls always seem to involve everyone working more" (*Bullshit Jobs* 194). This despite Banco Popular having their hand in the accruing of debt, while the ordinary citizens the campaign targets can do nothing more—no matter how much they work—to 'solve' the debt crisis other than see their lives, pensions, education and health services collapse while BPPR sees their profits increase the same year the debt is declared unpayable, PROMESA is passed, and La Junta is appointed.[47] In 2011, as the campaign inundated local media, BPPR was placed under receivership for problems and deficiencies in the management of documentation of its loans (Centro de Periodismo Investigativo).

After the group's speech, we see the musicians pick up their instruments—Ithier puts on headphones—and play them, witnessing their own labor contribution for the collective good, the 'sacrifice' of having them change the song to fit the neoliberal bootstrap narrative and motivating the masses to follow suit. I reproduce here the lyrics to the rewritten song, now titled "Con ganas de trabajar."

[47] "Popular, Inc. […] informó ganancias de $96.2 millones ($0.94 por acción) en el segundo trimestre de 2017, [lo que significa] un alza de 8.1% cuando se comparan con las ganancias de $89.0 millones en el mismo periodo del año pasado." (Martinez Lebrón, Amado. "Banco Popular y la crisis colonial de Puerto Rico")

Yo me levanto por la mañana

Salgo de casa bien elegante

Listo pa' echar pa' alante

Nunca pa' atrás, pa' atrás

Hoy le meto mano al día

Esa es mi filosofía

Derechito por mi vía

Y nunca pa' atrás, pa' atrás

De las seis hasta las doce

El día me lo aprovecho

Me gano mis habichuelas

Aquí o allá, y nunca pa' atrás

A las doce aprieta el hambre

Busco almuerzo en la guaguita

Pa'l frente voy en la fila

Con los demás, y nunca pa' atrás ("Echar pa'lante")[48]

The new song keeps the temporal rhythm of going through the subject's daily routine, but now the meditation of the day focuses on describing labor (albeit vaguely) and mostly reflecting on how exciting it is for its subject to spend all his time producing wealth for others. The decolonial

[48] "I wake up in the morning/leave my house looking elegant/Ready to move forward/Never looking back/I tackle the day/that is my philosophy/Straight through my way/ Never looking back/Between six and twelve/I take advantage of the day/I win my bread/Here or there, never looking back/At 12 I get hungry/I get lunch from the food truck/I move forward up the line/With the rest/and never look back" (my translation).

and leisurely temporality of the first song is replaced with the temporality of capital, the day structured around the workday and its productive capacity. The references to food are kept but go from enticing descriptions of local dishes to wordplay that refers to being able to pay the bills; “me gano las habichuelas” a colloquial turn of phrase that roughly translates to ‘making the dough.’

Si me da sueño como a las tres
Yo lo espanto con café
Y si se pone dura la cosa respiro hondo
Y rompo a cantar

A la la, a la la, a la la lara la lara

Y a la hora de la salida
Lo recuerdo como ayer
El sermón de mi viejita
Diciendo mijo hay que laborar
De cabeza y nunca pa’ atrás

Si me estanco en el tapón
Lo convierto en vacilón
Aprovecho la ocasión
Un momentito pa’ relajar

A la larara la la la

Me acuesto a dormir con sueños

Y mi motor pongo a descansar

Listo pa' arrancar mañana

Y nunca pa' atrás, pa' atrás

(Coro)

Qué bueno es vivir así con ganas de trabajar

Oiga yo siempre voy contento

Y positivo no voy a cambiar

Haciendo de todo un poco

Voy progresando, no voy para atrás no

Que bueno, que bueno, que bueno

Que bueno es vivir la vida echando pa'lante y nunca pa'tras

Hay que echar pa'lante[49]

The stanza that refers to taking a nap in the middle of the day in the original song gets replaced with drinking coffee to fend off the urge to sleep, in what might be the darkest instance of the violence of this rewriting: "Y si se pone dura la cosa respire hondo/Y rompo a cantar." The new

[49] "If I get sleepy at around 3/I drink some coffee/And if things get tough I take a deep breath/And start singing/A la la larara la la la/When it's time to clock out/I remember it like yesterday/My old mother's sermon/Telling me I must work/Head held high and never looking back/If I get stuck in traffic/I turn it into a party/I use the occasion/To have a little fun/A la la larara la la la/I go to bed full of dreams/Resting my engine/Ready for tomorrow/And never looking back/It's so great to live this way/with motivation to work/I'm always happy and positive/I'll never change/Doing a bit of everything/Always progressing never looking back/It's great to live life moving forward and never back" (my translation).

version also addresses music and art, but this time not as pleasures of leisure but as outlets to the desperation of the toll of work. The insistence on movement forward is violent, the maroon flight—movements of liberation—are stifled and replaced with hurried, automated thrusts forward into the time and space of capital. The attempted neoliberal cooptation of the indebted subject—the former maroon lazy subject—reaches into the physical body "hambre,sueño), the psyche ("me acusto a dormir con sueños"), and family ("el sermon de mi viejita/diciendo que hay que laborar.")

In the music video, the first shot once the song has started is of people getting on a public bus in San Juan (by now, San Juan's buses and public transportation has been practically decimated by austerity cuts) and workers in professional office attire getting on it. Throughout the video, we see images of a barber, a welder, a fashion designer, farmworkers picking mangos from trees, a young man building a surfboard, construction workers on a site, a man making bread, a teacher, and an office worker in BPPR's main office building at night. This assortment of working- and middle-class jobs targets Puerto Rico's working population, presented in stylized shots that aim to highlight the dignifying power of work. The shots of people are working are cut to the musicians recording the song in the studio, and often transition shots equate the labor of the workers with the musicians,' positioning them as workers too. We see the breadmaker tap the bread dough and transition into the tapping of the conga, the barber lowering his seat transitioning into the singer lowering his microphone, the fashion designer laying down her sketches transforms into the written music of the song, the farmer wiping the sweat from his brow while picking mangos transitions into one of the musicians wiping his own, or the construction worker opening his toolbox to find a trumpet. These images elevate the laborer's craft and position the craft of music as labor, presumably in the hopes that this parallel inspires

the ‘lazy masses’ to find dignity in labor via its association with the popular music that has corrupted or aided their vices in the past, but redeems itself now. The combination of the new lyrics and video present work as redemptive and encourage the infantilized and lazy Puerto Rican subjects to ‘try’ work as a curious novelty. The aesthetic sanitization of underpaid, exploitative physical work and the didactic tone of the lyrics infantilize the Puerto Rican listener, who is condescendingly scolded.

In *Colonial Debts*, Rocio Zambrana calls the “Echar pa’lante” campaign “a version of neoliberal self-as-enterprise in the context of collapse, capture, dispossession” (125). BPPR locates the ‘way out’ of a debt crisis they have created in individual entrepreneurship and collective sacrifice, despite the fact that, as Zambrana reminds us, “[l]ack of work […] has been central to a project of economic development, ideologically based on the link between work and upward mobility that would eventually lead to political self-determination” (123). She also comments on Miguel Rodríguez Casella’s “Echarpalantismo,” which she translates as “forward-facing resilience” (123). In “Echarpalantismo,” Miguel Rodríguez Casellas reflects on the implications of the campaign’s slogan “echar pa lante.” Analyzing its spatial and temporal contours, Rodríguez Casellas critiques the forward-motion direction of the phrase as a thrust to ignore the historical structural conditions that have created the crisis, as it “estigmatiza las miradas problematizadoras del pasado mientras impulsa el encuadre optimista del futuro” (Rodríguez Casellas, “Echarpalantismo”). The campaign desperately calls for forward-facing as a way to ignore the historical reality and conditions that made indebtedness possible, despite resting on the historical trope of pathologizing Puerto Ricans as lazy. This historical amnesia frees both the bank and the state of responsibility, blames individuals and the poor for the crisis, and proposes a shallow vision of the future where collapse (which is already happening) is

prevented by self-enterprising. The forward movement of the campaign's title is invoked repeatedly through the refusal to look back "nunca pa' atrás,"[50] in the song's lyrics, which one may read, following Rodriguez Casella's proposal, as a refusal to engage with historical memory, which includes invoking the history of marronage and resistance in the original song.

A decade after, in 2021, "Y no hago más ná" continues to be a favorite of the salsa repertoire, played often in radio stations, and played live in El Gran Combo live concerts. "Con ganas de trabajar" barely registers in the collective conscience. BPPR's campaign was just that, a marketing ploy that failed at making itself part of popular culture. The campaign's existence is only evidence of power's attempt to control and blame the marron and leisurely Puerto Rican subject into subjection, to interrupt its flight.

It goes without saying that resistance to capitalist labor disciplining is not unique or exceptional to Puerto Rico, although its colonial situation does account for disproportionately high unemployment rate. Colonial economic development that caters to foreign investment and which has dwindled under neoliberalism does not provide enough work to employ most of the population, much less employ them well. Laws 20 and 22 to attract US millionaires ensure the creation of an employment class in low-level servile jobs. Puerto Rico's low salaries and high cost of living also makes these jobs unattractive, as they do not provide enough income to account for even basic necessities. Under such circumstances, it might indeed be clever (as the song says) to be a 'mantenido,' though in reality such welfare is not a 'better' alternative but rather the only alternative, and it keeps half the population strapped to poverty levels and dependent on US federal income. Yet it is also important to note that in this sense, Puerto Rico's

[50] This desperate insistence on never looking back echos Arcadio Díaz Quiñones' *La memoria rota*, which argues that the lack of historical memory is a structural and targeted omission by Puerto Rico's colonized historiography.

debt crisis is linked to increased neoliberal capitalism globally, which has widened wealth gaps and social inequality, and while the particularities might differ, this underclass is growing not only in Puerto Rico but across the Global South and also in wealthy nations like the US.

Doing Nothing

Puerto Rican poet Ruben Ramos Colón has recently taken up the subject of labor in a sort of re-writing of El Gran Combo's original song. The poem "Propuesta de Financiamiento para el Plan de No Hacer Nada" dreams of a life without work. Its title plays off the language of political or otherwise administrative jargon, situating the poem as a satire of the neoliberal conventions of contemporary work life. The poem is written in the style of a letter that resembles a grant application or a job cover letter. Ramos Colón writes an explicit anthem to laziness and pokes fun at the current structures of wealth distribution, like the philanthropic model of requesting money from wealthy individuals or institutions in the form of grants, which in the poem evokes the quasi-feudal nature of this system. In *Bullshit Jobs*, David Graeber reflects on the model of grant applications as an industry of "competitive games" that are indeed feudal, what he calls "managerial feudalism" (188). He states:

> [M]anagerial feudalism ensures that thousands of hours of creative effort will literally come to nothing.[…] If a grant agency funds only 10 percent of all applications, that means that 90 percent of the work that went into preparing applications was […] pointless (188).

In mimicking the form of a grant application, it takes on the form of an epistolary poem. The first stanza declares there must be a millionaire among "los millones de millonarios que hay en el mundo," that has such an excess of resources that would be willing to "descuidar/una

minúscula porción de sus plusvalías/a Mi Proyecto" (Ramos Colón). "Mi Proyecto" once again echoes the language of applications, and the neoliberal obsession of branding the self into content. The epistolary written to a millionaire that can spare some of their riches caricaturizes the philanthropic model by laying bare the 'begging' required in this model. The speaker of the poem also nudges at the massive wealth inequality that characterizes these exchanges acknowledging his 'request' for a livelihood constitutes only "una minúscula porción de sus plusvalías" (Ramos Colón).

The second stanza lists the project's "objectives:" a modest boat, marijuana, a hammock. These articles enhance leisure or, as mentioned previously in reference to El Gran Combo's song, what we consider self-care, being the speaker's objectives illustrate a desire for a life outside the structures of productivity taken for granted under capitalism. "Cuidar el sueño hasta tarde pasado el mediodía/Comer pescado fresco siempre que el clima lo permita:" like in "Y no hago más ná," the speaker here desires sleep and food, that is, sustenance without productivity. The reference to fresh fish nudges at the islands' food sovereignty crisis that over-relies on imports like frozen fish, making local and fresh food a rare and privileged commodity. The objective is leisure, and one might be tempted to say laziness, but considering the context is important here. This is a very recent poem from 2021—in the crux of debilitating austerity, collapsing infrastructure, Hurricane Maria, and the long list of calamities that hinder everyday life— the desire for rest is also a call for respite in the midst and aftermath of trauma, of physical and psychic exhaustion, as the line "estoy harto de la incertidumbre" confirms. Yet the speaker does not entirely refuse the positive value of labor: "sé que la labor y el esfuerzo/poseen con propósito al desentendido." Whether this is an earnest consideration of the redeeming power of work or an example of an applicant saying the right thing, the speaker moves on to defend

boredom as aspirational: “pero de cuanto saludable aburrimiento/me roban los trabajos,/sus juegos de competencia,/los uniformes de gladiadores.” The next line declares, with echoes of Bartleby the Scrivener: “mejor no” (I’d rather not). The following lines are the poem’s most direct reference to “Y no hago más ná:” “mejor levantado de siesta/comer/y volver a dormir.” The speaker parodizes philanthropy to request becoming a ‘mantenido’ of a different social milieu, as the poem’s diction shows us the speaker is an educated, middle-class subject. What follows is a critique of neoliberal subjectivity as reasoning for the culture of work: “esa identidad del hago y del tengo,/esa persona contrapunto de otras.” From the vantage point of 2021, when most work produces service and information rather than commodities (Graeber), it is more than ever tangled up with people’s sense of self and self-worth, individual identity entangled in what we consume and what we do.

Ramos Colón’s poem continues the work of El Gran Combo’s original song, from a different social positionality and economic outlook. The poem does not quite articulate a form of maroon flight, since it’s framed as a plea to power, albeit satirically. But it does reiterate the desire for leisure as a form of freedom and it critiques the contemporary neoliberal logics that tie work to self-worth. In doing this, it continues a tradition of subversion to the logic of work and indebtedness, re-signifying laziness as a positive and desirable state.

I close coming back to the work of Mabel Rodríguez Centeno, who has proposed the term ‘vagancia queer.’ Expanding on her previous work on laziness and work, she considers the gender and sexual implications of the social imaginary of labor: “el trabajo es heterosexual. El trabajo es moderno, capitalista y colonial. El trabajo es constitutive de la heterosexualidad, está tan naturalizado como el binarismo hombre-mujer que sostiene el capitalismo” (168). She links Quijano’s framing of labor exploitation as constitutive of racial difference within the coloniality

of power and couples it with the way Lazzarato's indebted subjectivity "entrampa con promesas de autorealización fundamentadas en empresarimos individuales, con libertades en virtud del consume personal y sociabilidades aseguradas por la conectividad generalizada" (Rodríguez Centeno 170). From this she concludes that labor exploitation's race, gender, and sexual coordinates come together to make work such a normative value, and thus the subject that transgresses all these coordinates is necessarily queer:

> La pereza hace tambalear la arquitectura de las narrativas de triunfo y de progreso civilizatorio por sí misma, porque la molicie transgrede/subvierte las normativas sociales de la modernidad. Las normativas heterosexuales se hacen añicos desde los archivos de la vagancia (del rechazo al trabajo). Pero, cuando esa haraganería es cuir, cuando desestabiliza masculinidades y feminidades (reconocidas), su fuerza política se magnifica (172).

The cuir subject is historically best positioned to renounce the social mandates of work and productivity from all possible coordinates: queer laziness is then also an expression of decolonial, maroon liberation.

Conclusion

In 1968, the great Rafael Cortijo produced, with the second iteration of his band 'su bonche,' the album "Sorongo: Que es lo que el blanco tiene de negro?" The song that titles the album was a powerful philosophical meditation on race, power, and appropriation. As mentioned earlier, Cortijo was the first Black Puerto Rican musician with an all-Black musical orchestra to perform Blackness onstage, a pioneer of Puerto Rican popular music and Black thought.[51] In the record, the song "El prestamista," a plena written by famed composer Catalino 'Tite' Curet Alson, Cortijo sang:

[51] A new project by scholar Marissel Hernández called "De coco y anis: Un proyecto de amor para Rafael Cortijo Verdejo" sets out to honor the work of Cortijo through a Black lens by bringing together Black scholars, artists, and community figures to speak and write about the artist's legacy.

Dile que salí

que si vuelvo no sabes cuando

avanza titi

que el prestamista me está buscando (Curet Alonso).

Plenas are a genre of urban working classes that used its call and response form to communicate news around neighborhoods. In the song, the subject asks his aunt to shoo away a loan shark and offers a list of places he have gone to. The song is full of movement: the subject is purportedly in the shower, on the moon, in New York, or simple "lejo' lejo' lejo," playing a rhythmic and evasive hide and seek with the figure of financial power that surveils him and tries to get "el veinte porciento." The subject of the song recognizes his condition of indebtedness but does not validate it, using trickster movements to evade the authorities or apparatus of debt that aims to capture him. This is yet another example of maroon resistance through movement, which "manteniendo los valores de la espontaneidad y la libertad, permite evitar la confrontación con el poder" (Quintero Rivera, S*alsa*). Maroon resistance does not confront power, it instead uses trickster humor to take flight from oppressive structures and finds liberation in this flight. The subject's evasion from the 'debt man,' is a disidentification from power broadly, and an assertion of decolonial liberation fleetingly found in humor and movement.

I end with this reflection because I believe it encapsulates most of the gestures that the works I have examined in this dissertation point us towards. The image of the man who sings a plena as he evades indebtedness is an aesthetic representation of the link between debt and coloniality I have tried to articulate. Throughout this dissertation, I have moved from the indebted man and indebted subjectivity, through (trans)feminist refusals of obedience and

indebtedness and towards the maroon decolonial subject that embraces laziness and refuses debt and labor altogether. Though I have also looked across the spectrum of reactions towards debt that include the embodiment of power—namely Lin-Manuel Miranda and Banco Popular—attempting to document a nuanced analysis of discourses about debt, the affective weight of this work is located in this flight.

I have analyzed cultural texts that address the links between debt and coloniality. My analysis shows that these texts are arenas where popular opinions about the indebted condition are not only reflected but produced. The broad range of cultural objects—Broadway theater, salsa songs, media campaigns, and poetry—are brought together by expressing, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in the circumstances of their production, distribution, or staging, discourses about being indebted. The order in which I have presented these texts illustrate the range of positions towards debt. *Hamilton* and Lin-Manuel Miranda allowed me to show how the indebted subject internalizes the injunction to pay and thus embodies the guilt and docility of indebtedness, which is then expressed as a mainstream response to the debt: 'it needs to be paid.' I frame Miranda as a contemporary and neoliberal incarnation of a patriarchal genealogy in the lettered elite of the islands. I also show how play *Hamilton* exemplifies the coloniality of power, and provide ethnographic analysis about the show's production in San Juan in the context of Hurricane Maria recovery.

In the second chapter I move to poetic refusals of this logic by focusing on contemporary feminist poetry that addresses debt from a completely different position. I argue that the writers I examine in this chapter: Mara Pastor, Raquel Salas Rivera, and Nicole Delgado, and Ariadna Godreau Aubert refuse indebtedness by outlining its connections to feminized obedience and guilt. Their poems enact decolonial futures for Puerto Rico grounded on feminist care and

communities, a form of non-capitalist labor that sustains life in Puerto Rico against the havoc of the debt crisis and colonial capitalism. Their books are also fundamental parts of a literary field that, as a result of the crises' consequence impoverishment of cultural institutions such as publishing houses, moves the poets I analyze outside traditional literary networks that gives female, queer, and Black poets more space in the local literary conversation.

In the final chapter, I return to popular culture to attend to works that express decolonial resistance. While the original text I look at, salsa song "Y ni hago más ná" by El Gran Combo, does not speak to indebtedness directly, it articulates decolonial resistance to capitalist labor demands and celebrates leisure, reverting the colonial trope of laziness. After tracking the historical origins of this trope, I use the example of the Banco Popular de Puerto Rico media campaign "Echar pa'lante" to show the neoliberal and contemporary criminalization of Puerto Rican colonial subjects as lazy. This campaign responds to the debt crisis by criminalizing individual Puerto Ricans and demanding individual solutions to a structural issue they have had a heavy hand in creating. I find that El Gran Combo's "Y no hago más ná" is a subversive expression of marronage that celebrates (fleeting) decolonial liberation. As a whole, the texts that make up this dissertation don't offer a unified stance on indebtedness, but they share insight into the relationship between debt and coloniality in contemporary Puerto Rico.

Methodologically, I combined close textual readings of poetry and popular culture texts with discourse analysis, historiography, and ethnographical observations. This multidisciplinary approach allowed me to examine indebtedness from a variety of vantage points, and the diversity of the texts offered the perspectives of different publics. While this is not a comprehensive study of how the debt crisis has impacted Puerto Rican culture, it contributes to scholarly conversations in a variety of disciplines: nuancing broad social perspectives through textual

analysis and broadening literary perspectives by considering the economic and political theories of indebtedness and coloniality.

This project has opened questions that require further inquiry. Namely, a comprehensive study of the publishing industry in Puerto Rico would add weight to the arguments about the place of feminist indebted refusals in contemporary Puerto Rican poetry and literature. I also had many examples of the way the debt crisis is expressed in prose literature that I did not have the space for, especially the work of the wonderful Marta Aponte Alsina. For the *Hamilton* chapter, a deeper examination of the shift between state funded cultural nationalism and the emerging role of philanthropic capitalism is needed, as well as a look at the landscape of cultural work in Puerto Rico post-Hamilton and the financial contributions he has made. My work suggested that this shifting financialization landscape leaves political and aesthetic traces that should be considered more closely.

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