"CREEN QUE NOSOTROS SOMOS UNA SILLA QUE PUEDEN MOVER": NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION REFORM AND CAMPAMENTO WOMANIST RESISTANCE

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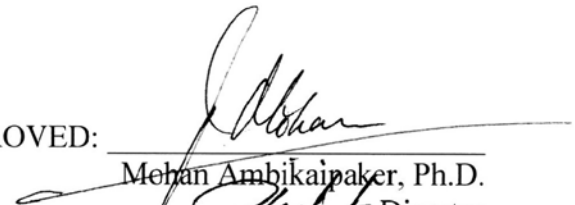

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Para mi familia; en especial mi primera y mejor maestra, mi mamá, y mi primer mentor antisistemico, mi papá.

Para las maestras y madres combativas de Puerto Rico que luchan incansablemente, creativamente, y compasivamente por una educación pública accesible y de calidad. Agradezco especialmente a Liza, Eva, Mercedes, todas las queridas Muñoncitas, y líderes del campamento de LRA.

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* * *

Educación a distancia

Desde lejos
Mis contactos
Ya comenzaron
A llenar mi inbox
Con *bendiciones*
Alegría
Varios *benditos*,
Y *abrazos solidarios*.

Y no me conocen aún.

Me mandan selfies
Con sus amistades
Que recibo como flores
Que no merezco.

Y entre liderar
Una lucha nacional,
Procurar electricidad,
Cuidar de sus hijos,
Y pintar su salón escolar,
Se disculpan
Por perder mi llamada.

Y no hay palabras.

¿Qué se dice allí?

Se despiden con un
"Estamos para servirle"
Con la grandeza pura
De una leona
Saludando a una curiosa hormiguita.

Aún no abro mi libreta,
Ni comienzo a cuestionar,
Formular, o analizar—
Pero qué lecciones
Me han impartido ya
Las maestras de Puerto Rico.

* * *

Introduction

Día #33

I approached the group of people sitting in front of the school's front gate, greeted them, and told them I was looking for Marta. A mature, thin, dark-skinned woman in yellow top turned to me, smiled, and identified herself. I had just introduced myself and mentioned the purpose of my visit when one of the women, after asking me to take a seat, began speaking with a steadfast voice: "Mire, nosotros no estamos en contra del cambio" (look, we are not opposed to change). She was one of several people, mostly women and kids, sitting in a circular formation under a white plastic canopy protecting us from the tropical 3p.m. sun. "Esto es una resistencia a los atropellos, no a los cambios" (this is a resistance to violations, not to change), she continued. Other voices in the group agreed and built on her sentiment. Looking around, it occurred to me that this was the first time I encountered a predominantly non-white Puerto Rican crowd gathered in the same space. I had spent most of my time in the San Juan bubble thus far, and as such, had mostly interacted with my housemates and previous contacts (all of whom were no older than 35 and light-skinned, like me).

It was late July and day number 33 of the encampment or *campamento* at the Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera in Dorado, a municipality about 15 miles west of San Juan, in the northern coast of the Island. This was one of several campamentos that had been

erected that summer[1] in an attempt to remove their school from the list of about 250 institutions across Puerto Rico that were due to close at the start of the school year (Agencia EFE, 2018a; Rivera Clemente, 2018a). School closures and the 2018 education reform law, Ley Número 85 (Law Number 85), were both key components of the Puerto Rican public school system restructuring under the leadership of Governor Rosselló and Secretary of Education, Julia Keleher.

Lorena's statement, which sought to set the record straight and frame their protest for a newcomer like me, contained two key points that I would hear repeatedly in the field and through the course of my research: 1) this is a defense against abusive methods and infringements of our dignity, and 2) we are capable and willing to engage in positive transformation. Her obvious intention to *clarify* their motivations to organize the campamentos demonstrated not only an intention to speak their truth but the possible "threat" that my young, light-skinned, bilingual, U.S.-mainland presence signified in the context of the fight to save public education in Borikén. Campamentos, after all, were physical occupations of public schools to protect them from being permanently shut down by a blonde Pennsylvanian woman, Secretary of Education Julia Keleher, who had arrived to the Island ten years prior. My recorder on hand and regular notetaking often led people to think I was a member of the media, another tool Keleher had at her disposal.

The order to close Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera, the school that Lorena's daughter attended and loved, was but one of hundreds that have swept through Puerto Rico in the past few years against a background of abandoned buildings, mass emigrations, and

[1] Based on my research, instances of school encampments in opposition to public school closures in Puerto Rico were seen as early as 2014.

massive real estate land grabs. The landscape of Borikén, both its buildings and its people, was changing rapidly and people like Lorena were being cleared out of the way—out of decision making tables, out of public spaces, even out of their own homes (Jervis, 2018). She, like many campamento participants in working-class Puerto Rican school communities, demanded answers –why our school? Why now? Why like this? —, but they also demanded to have a say in shaping the future of their children's education and their communities.

At the same time, Lorena's defensive and firm tone demonstrated a keen awareness of the narrative that had been constructed around their efforts. My analysis of Secretary of Education Julia Keleher's discourse, supported by Governor Rosselló and wide mainstream media coverage, revealed a subtle deployment old colonial tropes about Puerto Rican people to justify and promote the neoliberalization of the Puerto Rican public school system as the solution that was direly needed. Through this discourse, protesters were being casted as retrogrades, as irrational actors, as impediments of progress. Such ideologies have undergirded structures of imperial domination for centuries the world over, and specifically in the form of U.S. imperialism in Borikén since the late 19th century. In the sphere of education specifically, the United States colonial regime used these frameworks to establish and control the public education system as part of an Americanization process intended to pacify and form colonial subjects.

Standing diametrically opposed to the historical patterns of white supremacist, patriarchal forms of domination that have sought to impose their control on the people of Puerto Rico are the anti-colonial, anti-individualistic, womanist values embodied by the

campamentos. With a radical grassroots, autonomous, horizontal, affective approach, multiple generations of women and children engaged in small-scale political projects to defend a fundamental bastion of their working class neighborhoods—their *escuelita* (little school). While modest, the campamentos profoundly challenge the neoliberal conceptions of the school as a public institution bound by cost-saving budgets, standardized test scores, and expendable labor pools. The campamentos highlight the way some of the most marginalized sectors in the Puerto Rican Archipelago created and sustained place-based networks of support through the neighborhood public school that not only afforded their children with access to an education, but that also enhanced the entire community's quality of life and sense of identity as working class Puerto Rican communities.

Terminology

Throughout this essay, "Puerto Rico" will be used interchangeably with the original indigenous name of the Island, "Borikén," as a recognition of its original peoples and the region's history of European settler colonialism. I generally use Borikén to identify the territory itself and its everyday people as opposed to or colonial or governmental apparatuses. "The Archipelago" and "the Island" will also be used interchangeably to refer to Puerto Rico. While "the Island" (or "la Isla") is attuned to what Puerto Ricans commonly use to refer to their homeland, "Archipelago" is a more accurate descriptor[2] and more inclusive of all the more remote geographic areas that make up Puerto Rico (and whose communities, not surprisingly, experience more abject

[2] Puerto Rico is made up of one major island, six minor islands, and hundreds of islets (Abruña, n.d.)

marginalization[3]). Furthermore, although Borikén's official political status is that of "U.S. territory" or "Commonwealth" and thus not a sovereign state, I nevertheless refer to it as a nation given that "Puerto Ricans consider themselves a nation in virtually every sense, regardless of political affiliation or preference of decolonization strategy" (Abraham, 2019).

Second, "Boricua" (from Borikén) will be used interchangeably with "Puerto Rican." While there is a variety of terms that have been used to refer to Puerto Ricans of African ancestry, I will use the terms "Black" and "afrodescendientes" in accordance with the terms commonly used in Puerto Rico, and in translation of the Spanish terms "negro" and "negra" (which were used by my collaborators who identified with these terms). At the same time, while my study includes statistics or scholarship that uses these or other labels (Afro-Boricua, negro/a, Afro-Puerto Rican, etc.) to describe this social group, individuals may not necessarily identify with them. Moreover, though I do my best to apply an intersectional lens to my research, conversations around race were not something I generally encountered during my research thus limiting my ability to make original contributions to emic understandings of race in the Island.

Third, for the sake of clarity, I have had to make choices regarding the terminology I use to refer to individuals with one or multiple disabilities, though I am familiar with and respect both sides of the debate between using people-first language (e.g. child with autism) versus identity-first language (e.g. autistic child).[4] My selection in wording is based on what is commonly used in Puerto Rico's public education system to

[3] I would like to credit Dr. Marlan Pagán-Mattos for raising this fact and issue during a radio interview with Radio Isla, an occasion at which I happened to be present during my fieldwork.
[4] For more information on this discussion, see Brown's "Identity-First Language" (n.d.) or Andrews et.al. "#SaytheWord: A disability culture commentary on the erasure of "disability" (2019).

refer to the children and youth with disabilities enrolled in the special education program; that is, “special education students” (estudiantes de educación especial). At the same time, many Puerto Rican advocates and scholars in the field of disability rights prefer the people-first model, and specifically the term “personas con diversidad funcional" (people with functional diversity) (Pérez Medina & Gil Bravo, 2015; Velázquez, Pietri, & Maldonado, 2013). Because “people with functional diversity” does not have the same resonance in the English-speaking disability rights community, I will abide by the people-first model. As it is always the case, I acknowledge that the terminology here used may not be that which is preferred by the person(s) or groups to whom it intends to refer.

Lastly, in applying a gender focus to this study, I commonly employ the term “women” as a blanket term but recognize that this wording may fail to capture the gender diversity present in this social group. I have no doubt that members of the trans and gender non-conforming community are also parents and educators invested in saving public education in Borikén (my first trip to Puerto Rico in 2016 highlighted the fact that queer activists are indeed leading transformative grassroots projects in their communities), but I regret that I cannot speak to this topic in any meaningful way based on the data at my disposal. As such, the labels “women” and “men” are meant to be seen broadly, and were assumed based on the researcher’s observations and conversations (although not explicitly confirmed by participants). I hope future research helps to shed light on the intersection of these identities and experiences.

Approaching Issues of Race in Contemporary Puerto Rico

Because I seek to draw attention to the ways race and gender mediates this revamping of public education in Puerto Rico, a place where discussions of race are

discouraged, it is important to delineate how these topics will be approached. Alamo-Pastrana's concept of "racial imbrication" is helpful in understanding the particularities of race in Borikén, which "[occur] at the structured and relational meeting points along the margins of racial regimes" (2016, p.12). Racial imbrication thus functions at the junctures of the U.S.-Commonwealth relationship, which takes into account the racialized political and economic position of Puerto Rico as a U.S. colony, while also interacting with white supremacist ideologies that were incubated in the Island before and during U.S. occupation.

Despite the fact that Puerto Ricans are considered U.S. citizens and recent Census records point to an overwhelmingly self-identified white population,[5] Puerto Ricans continue to be regarded as outside the parameters of what is white and "American," both to the U.S. government and in the dominant U.S. national imaginary. It is not uncommon, for instance, for the average person in continental U.S. to ignore the fact that Puerto Rico is a U.S. protectorate or that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Moreover, scholars have documented the way Puerto Ricans who migrate to continental U.S. have been historically treated as Black, both in the way they face similar structural oppression as African Americans, and in the way other Latin Americans associate them with blackness (M. Q. Rivera, 2006; R. Z. Rivera, 2003). The deafening silence in U.S. media regarding the mass school closures –over 450 schools in the past two school years—confirms the disregard for Puerto Rican lives and wellbeing. This apathy is not unlike the little attention that was given to the

[5] The percentage of Puerto Ricans identified as white in census records are as follows: 79.9% in 1950, 80.5% in 2000, and 75.8% in 2010 (Loveman & Muniz, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

49 schools the Chicago school district closed in 2014, which mostly served low-income Black families (Strauss, 2018). Not surprisingly, many dark-skinned Puerto Ricans come to "find out" they are Black upon coming into contact with U.S. institutions or migrating to continental U.S., and develop social, political, and cultural ties with African Americans as a means of survival and resistance(Alamo-Pastrana, 2016; Collazo, 1998; R. Z. Rivera, 2003). The pictures of Puerto Ricans as largely poor, uncultured, dark-skinned masses that permeated the U.S. expansionist imaginary continue to have resonance to this day, even as this blackness is conveniently hid in statistical and Census records.

We can then consider Puerto Rico's more organic, historical contributions to the racial imbrication project. A Spanish-imposed racial hierarchy combined with that of the U.S., thus keeping white supremacy relevant despite the state-sponsored promotion of a racial democracy ideology. Seeking to secure a foothold in a new colonial order under U.S. power, the Spanish-descent Puerto Rican elite attempted to craft a national identity that could provide them support and legitimacy. Deploying their economic and political influence this class, including Puerto Rican governors, promoted the idea of Puerto Ricans as the product of las tres raíces, or three roots: Spanish, Black, and Borikén's original peoples, the Taíno.[6] Although this triad has served as a supposed testament to the harmonious relations between social groups, there is evidence that Black and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans continue to face socioeconomic and political exclusion. These inequities and ill-treatment include, for

[6] While *Taíno* is certainly the most commonly used term to refer to Puerto Rico's "second root," Anderson-Córdova reminds us that this is "as much a misnomer as the Spaniard's use of the term 'Indians' to refer to the inhabitants of the New World [sic]" (2017, p. 16). He indicates that the term Carib or *jíbaro* are more appropriate and historically accurate terms.

example, significantly higher unemployment rates and health disparities (Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2017), excessive use of force by the police (Figuero Cancel, 2018a), lack of quality Black history curriculum in public schools (I. P. Godreau, Reyes Cruz, Franco Ortiz, & Cuadrado, 2008), and experiencing racism in interpersonal interactions (Lloréns, García-Quijano, & Godreau, 2017).

Moreover, the myth of racial democracy, as it is the case in other Latin American and Caribbean countries, has served to silence conversations around race and to trivialize or dismiss real manifestations of structural racism and discrimination (I. Godreau et al., 2013; Rodríguez-Silva, 2012). The high cost of being Black in Puerto Rico, combined with pressures for *blanqueamiento* (whitening), and a racial classification system that places blackness either in the past or outside of the nation, has resulted in consistently low numbers of Puerto Ricans who self-identify as Black or Afro-Puerto Rican (Lloréns, 2018; Loveman & Muniz, 2007). At the same time, however, the relative flexibility and ambiguity of racial identifications in Puerto Rican society has meant that many Boricuas will identify or place others within a spectrum that takes a mixed racial background as dominant (I. Godreau, 2015; Gravlee, 2005). Nevertheless, this has also resulted in the development of a society where racism is manifested in the form of colorism (also known as a "pigmentocracy"), which includes a wide range of categories for race while continuing to hold whiteness as supreme.[7]

[7] See Bonilla-Silva's "E Pluribus Unum, or the Same Old Perfume in a New Bottle?" in *Racism without Racists* (2014).

Unfortunately, because Puerto Rican state institutions are highly invested in upholding the myth of racial democracy to maintain the status quo, there is a serious deficit of data and information that can serve to analyze the implications of race in the island. Consider, for example, that from 1960-1990 the Puerto Rican government, did not collect population data on race as it was "'the most adequate and convenient solution for our economic, social, and cultural reality,'" according to a government official (Duany, 2000). Similarly, the Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico (DEPR) does not offer any meaningful ways to analyze race as a factor in their data,[8] aside from federal data collection requirements.

As a result, at this stage of race studies in the island, it is my hope that I contribute to what Jemima Pierre calls the "uncovering" of "the not-so-hidden transcripts of 'race'" (Pierre, 2008) by pointing to the ways in which the Puerto Rican system of public education is a site where Spanish and U.S. colonial legacies of white supremacy are reproduced. In this "uncovering," I also acknowledge the limitations of my investigation given the data available and length of my ethnographic experience, and invite others to build on this line of inquiry.

Puerto Rico Then and Now

Recognizing Puerto Rico's history and unique political status is crucial to understanding its present reality and the structures shaping its possibilities. Indigenous groups had lived in Borikén for at least 5000 years (Rodríguez Ramos, 2010, para. 1) by

[8] Currently, the DE website provides statistics on categories such as graduation rates and standardized test scores, but "ethnicity" breakdowns are limited to "Puerto Rican," "non-Puerto Rican Hispanics," "non-Hispanic Whites," and "Other" (Puerto Rico Department of Education, 2018). As a result, racial diversity is denied under a homogenous "Puerto Rican" ethnicity, impeding an identification with blackness, and implicitly locating blackness outside a national prototype.

the time the Spanish Crown established its first colonial settlement in 1508. Following the historical pattern of many other Latin American and Caribbean nations, Borikén experienced the genocide of most of its native population, the import of enslaved Africans, the exploitation of people and the land under Spanish colonists, uprisings against slaveholders, and eventually, implacable demands for greater political autonomy from the Crown. These demands were partially addressed in November 1897, when the Spanish Queen conceded Puerto Rico an "Autonomy Statute" that guaranteed a cabinet, parliament, and municipal elections (Cagiao Vila, 1998, pp. 30–31).

Thwarted by the Spanish-American War, these possibilities never came into fruition. Under the banner of "[securing] to the people of Porto Rico in the most ample measure all the blessings...enjoyed by the people of the United States" (Kennedy, Watkins, Curtis, as qtd. in War Department, 1899, p. 4), the U.S. instituted a military government that presided over all matters and did not allow democratic elections to take place until 1948. Ever since its occupation and to the detriment of most Puerto Ricans, the U.S. has exerted political and economic control over Borikén in various forms, both through official policy and undue influence. "In the early twentieth century," as César J. Ayala thoroughly documents in *American Sugar Kingdom*, "the development of a free labor market, the introduction of the latest technological advances in the sugar mills, and fast-paced economic integration to the U.S. economy are to be blamed for the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment" (1999, pp. 2–3).

Despite Puerto Ricans' ability to participate in democratic elections to choose local and state officials,[9] many agree that Puerto Rico is "the oldest colony," as stated in a Viejo San Juan mural. In 1952, Puerto Rico adopted its current political status of "Commonwealth" or "Estado Libre Asociado," a title that has been upheld in several referendums amidst great political battles among pro-statehood, pro-independence, and pro-Commonwealth advocates (Negrón-Muntaner, 2007). Today, Puerto Rico must abide by federal law, its young males must register for the U.S. Selective Service, its laws can be vetoed by the U.S. President, and all goods entering its ports must be carried by U.S.-flagged ships.[10] However, Boricuas living in the Island cannot vote in Presidential elections, nor do they have voting members in the U.S. Congress. In this way, Borikén's ability to address its most pressing problems and vie for its best interests has been perpetually limited by its [neo]colonial status.

One of the most formidable examples of this lack of autonomy is its limitations in the face of the recent financial crisis. After decades of tax breaks for foreign corporations (García Lopez, 2018) and incessant borrowing to cover operational costs (Merling, 2018), the Puerto Rican government faced bankruptcy by 2015. However, because Puerto Rico is excluded from U.S. bankruptcy law protections,[11] the U.S. struck down the Puerto Rican government's attempt to restructure its debt and instead paved the way for the

[9] This includes the governor of Puerto Rico, members of the legislature, city mayors, referendums, and plebiscites, among other local matters.

[10] According to a recent study, this U.S. naval exclusivity translates to Puerto Ricans spending 2.7 times more money on goods entering their ports than they would if international ships were admitted (Feliciano, 2019). The Jones Act posed an enormous obstacle for the delivery of resources and support to the Island following hurricane Maria; it was lifted by President Trump for a period of 10 days due to public pressure.

[11] This law "provides a favorable framework for restructuring debts of public local entities, which respects the sovereignty of the debtor and does not allow courts to require liquidations of assets" (Merling, 2018, p. 4).

imposition of a financial oversight board through a congressional act, also known as PROMESA (the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act). In February 2019, U.S. District Court Judge Laura Taylor Swain ruled to uphold an unaudited debt to be paid in the next 40 years, representing one-quarter of what Puerto Rico is still left to pay. Advocates in the Island expect further tax increases and fear widespread human rights violations as a result of even less responsive social services (*[El acuerdo de COFINA aprobado ayer en la Corte Federal]*, 2019).

Research Background

Introduced in February 2018, Governor Ricardo Rosselló announced his plan to "transform" the system of public education in Puerto Rico. The proposal came amidst a country still recovering from a devastating Hurricane María, which exacerbated an existing economic crisis and ongoing defunding of public goods and services as directed by the oversight board. Rosselló's plan, enthusiastically backed by the DEPR leadership, sought to restructure the administration of schools, create a "school choice"[12] voucher program, implement standardized student assessments, close over 250 school campuses, and open a set of pilot charter schools termed "Escuelas Alizanza" (Metro Puerto Rico, 2018a). In addition, science, engineering, arts, math, and research would be especially promoted (alluding to the popular acronym STEAM); special needs students would be better "integrated;" and a new

[12] The concept of "freedom of choice" in the US public school system has its roots in movements opposing desegregation following the *Brown v. Board of Education* supreme court ruling. Segregationists grounded their arguments in giving parents "the freedom to choose" which schools their children would attend. This rhetoric served to delay desegregation (upholding the false claim that blacks could attend whatever school they chose and active desegregation was not necessary) and as a battle cry for white parents and their supporters, who employed both traditional political advocacy as well as the use of violence to maintain a segregated school system. (See Bolton, 2005; Minchin, 2011)

model of education that would prepare students "for real life" would be adopted (Ruiz Kuilan, 2018). Teacher unions as a collective were especially swift in denouncing the plan; they saw it as a direct attack on public education and condemned the top-to-bottom approach that failed to consult those most affected. In tandem, a wave of localized battles to defend individual schools emerged, largely led by the individuals who made public education in Puerto Rico *function* every day: working-class mothers, grandmothers, teachers, school staff, and children.

Meanwhile, observers in the island and beyond, familiar with the story of a post-Katrina New Orleans, began to sense historical déjà vu: a predominantly non-white community experiences an extremely destructive natural disaster and officials rush to re-design their system of education with no community input, opening the doors to the distribution of public funds to private entities. The similarities were striking, but it was imperative to understand what these changes meant in the Puerto Rican context specifically, as well as how this informed the outlook for public education at a global scale.

Thesis, Objectives, and Research Question

It is the task of this paper to identify and expose the ways in which U.S. colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and a neoliberal market logic continue to converge in the creation, justification, and implementation of education reform in post-María Puerto Rico. I argue that the 2018 education reform and the accompanying massive school closures work together to *reinscribe* racial and gender inequalities, which economically and politically disempower poor Puerto Rican women and communities, a sociopolitical dynamic that can be traced back to at least

U.S. invasion of Borikén at the turn of the twentieth century. As such, the public education system in Puerto Rico becomes both a microcosm and a branch of colonial control and capitalist exploitation. At the same time, I highlight the campamento as a space of resistance that is particularly effective in subverting and repairing the gender and race subordination, the disempowering effects of state violence and neglect, and the capitalist commodification of educational politics.

In exploring this moment in the history of public education in Puerto Rico, this thesis poses the following questions: What role does race play in the changes taking place in the public education system and in its potential implications? What does a gender analysis tell us about the dynamics and potential effects of the recent policies in Puerto Rican education? Do school closures and the 2018 education reform break away from a colonial paradigm or reinforce it? How so? How are Puerto Ricans "on the ground" challenging the rhetoric and policies of the "nueva educación"[13] espoused by the state? What does the Puerto Rican education reform struggle teach us about the future of public education and education advocacy? Lastly, what can alternative forms of expression contribute to the research process and how can they act as an occupation in the academy?

Theoretical Framework

My argument rests on key principles that a) explicate the relationship between neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, and b) recognize that scholarship

[13] "Nueva educación" is a term that the DE used to refer to the set of measures they pushed as their "new vision" for the public education system.

can serve to ally in critique and provide an activist intervention in the face of such violent systems.

As many feminist and critical race scholars have thoroughly demonstrated, capitalism and imperialism have rested on racial and gendered hierarchies for hundreds of years (Cusicanqui, 2012; Harris, 1992; Mies, 2001; Moisés & Galeano, 2017; Mullings, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). First, indigenous populations were dispossessed of their land and effectively made non-citizens (Saito, 2014). During the colonial period, chattel slavery became a vital source of free labor for white settlers, who sought to exploit the land they stole and occupied in the Americas and the Caribbean (Horne, 2016; Rodney, 1974; Williams, 1994). As Joel Olson argues in "The Problem of the White Citizen," this reliance on imported African labor gave rise to a robust ideology that made non-white bodies enslavable and subhuman. "African slavery solved the labor problem," but "in order to prevent class unity and […] rebellion, Virginia's elite deliberately attempted to divide the dangerous freemen from the dangerous slaves with a 'screen of racial contempt'" (2004, pp. 35–36). As indigeneity and blackness became a basis for exploitation, commodification, and violence in the colonial system, whiteness became the basis of personhood, privilege, and legal rights. This racialized order became a convenient global logic for political and economic domination, which W.E.B. DuBois famously referred to as "the issue of the color line" (DuBois, 2014). John Narayan explains how Huey P. Newton predicted a "new phase of imperialism [that] would blur the geo-politics of DuBois' colour line" in order to expand "markets, labour and consumption" (2017, p. 2485). While the lines were indeed blurred, it is widely accepted that racism and colorism continue to be key elements of preserving the status quo, which

consequently uphold white supremacy by keeping non-white groups politically, socially, and economically disenfranchised (Ambikaipaker, 2018; Chen, 2000; Jung, Costa Vargas, & Bonilla-Silva, 2011).[14] Thus race continues to be inextricably linked to our current global capitalist economic order, and manifests itself at macro (in imperial dynamics between world regions and countries), meso (within national borders), and micro levels (interpersonally).

At the same time, I uphold the work of feminist scholars who have highlighted the way capitalist colonial and imperialist projects are, by definition, patriarchal systems. Indigenous studies scholar Andrea Smith holds that "to colonize peoples whose societies are not based on social hierarchy," the white settler colonial order first had to "naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy" (2006, p. 72). This is echoed by ecofeminist theorists, who have demonstrated that the insatiable capitalist drive for production and profit is facilitated by a patriarchal logic of human's violent possession and exploitation of the Earth, in tandem with men's violent possession and exploitation of women (Bustillos Durán, 2005; Mies & Shiva, 2014; Oksala, 2018).[15] That is, both forms of control –over the Earth and over women-- are variants of the same worldview, and both dynamics actively maintain a system where men hold economic and political power. However, it is of utmost importance to highlight that these tenets are not to be taken as blanket statements of gender relations, but rather as a system that interacts with other systems of control (such as white supremacy, as outlined above). In the colonial system, for example, it was the labor of enslaved African women that afforded white women

[14] This is true even in nations where Black, brown, and mixed-race individuals make up the majority of the population see for example Thomas, 2004; Whitten & Torres, 1998.
[15] While elements of gender nonconformity and non-heteronormaty add an additional layer of complexity to this issue beyond the scope of

decreased labor and increased comfort and leisure time. Similarly, "without the ongoing exploitation of external colonies – formerly as direct colonies, today within the new international division of labour – the establishment of the 'internal colony', that is, a nuclear family and a woman maintained by a male 'breadwinner', would not have been possible" (Mies, 2001, p. 110). This stratified division of labor, in which women's labor is either underpaid or unpaid, is as much part of our contemporary economic reality today as it was hundreds of years ago. Especially in the past decades, the spread of neoliberal policies in the form of "increased privatization of social services,…the retrenchment of important federal programs," and in the Global South through the raise of key subsistence imports, has resulted in extra burdensome demands on the main workers of reproductive labor: women (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 90).

Specifically, I apply a feminist lens that preoccupies itself with examining dynamics of gender and power in Puerto Rico as a territory under U.S. authority. I borrow from and build on Black feminist epistemology that documents and examines Afro-descendant women's politically informed practice and ideas. I choose the term "womanist" rather than "feminist" to analyze the social advocacy in the campamento setting because its theorization and praxis falls more closely in line with the grassroots practices of the Puerto Rican women I encountered in my fieldwork. First theorized by Alice Walker in 1979 as a way to refer to a common person's "pro-woman" political ideas, both similar to (in gender equity values) and distinctive from mainstream feminism (in a racialized lived experience and standpoint) (Maparyan, 2012, pp. 15–16). Maparyan offers an excellent synthesis of "womanism" that closely matches the praxis of women campamento activists: "Womanism –the womanist idea—circulates 'out there' in the

'real world' and is a means by which 'everyday' women, whether they work inside or outside the academy, transform 'everyday' settings and the political consciousness of 'everyday' people in line with a particular vision of human well-being, social justice, and commonweal" (2012, p. 32). Thus through a postcolonial feminist framework, I aim to capture the role that colonialism in the form of U.S. imperialism plays in the structural conditions and dominant ideologies of present-day Puerto Rico, while at the same time, recognizing the political agency of a social group that has occupied one of the most vulnerable positions in Puerto Rican history: Black and mixed-race Boricuas.

While the scholarship outlined above has been instrumental to the development of theories that illuminate how these interlocking systems of oppression have operated throughout time, the systems' ability to reformulate in order to survive demand our constant need to study and revise our understanding of them in order to change them. This is what Derrick Bell refers to when he speaks of "racial realism," for despite "temporary 'peaks of progress'…racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance" (as qtd. in Saito, 2014, p.5). Similarly, feminist authors have already pointed to the way in which recent neoliberal policies, promoted under the guise of "development" and "women's empowerment" actually translate into the integration of women –especially women of color-- into cheap, precarious, and often dangerous labor markets (D. D. Aguilar & Lacsamana, 2004; Fudge & Owens, 2006; Fussell, 2000). Consequently, the present work is an attempt to bring to light the ways in which systems of oppression make themselves present in the educational sphere and contemporary neoliberal policies, in the hopes of contributing to a larger collective liberatory project of naming the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2000). This falls in line with the activist

scholar model, which "work[s] in dialogue, collaboration, alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives;…[and] embodies a responsibility for results that these 'allies' can recognize as their own, value in their own terms, and use as they see fit" (Hale, 2008). As many Black feminist scholars have argued, part of these relationships of collaboration with individuals in the field (or subjects in the historical record) include the recognition of every day people's ability to analyze their conditions and formulate theories about the world regardless of whether they hold university titles or not (Hill Collins, 2000; Neville & Hamer, 2001; Perlow, Wheeler, Bethea, & Scott, 2018). I do my best to credit the contributions of my collaborators to my analysis, and I include their perspectives to the best of my ability. Moreover, the activist-scholar ideal is also self-reflexive in nature, for it demands a researcher's constant reflection of not only her relationship with her object of study, but also with her collaborators and the product of her labor (the academic text).

Recognizing academia's role in serving colonialist and imperialist projects (Cusicanqui, 2012; Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Jacobs, 2008; Mignolo, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), and in line with a reflexive approach, I engage with the academic text as a site of contestation by demystifying the research process via the visibilization of researcher-as-subject and the integration of varied forms expression. In contrast to traditional Western academic works that obscure knowledge behind jargon and invests in the exclusivity of academia, decolonial scholarship instead seeks to "demystify" knowledge by presenting theories and analysis in a way that is relevant, accessible, and useful to communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). As such, the organization, language, and form that this text takes looks to serve this purpose of elucidation. It is also important to

note that part of academia's power in upholding oppressive systems has been its establishment as a scientific, logical, unbiased voice, which has lent it supreme legitimacy and authority. Historically and to this day, patriarchy and white supremacy have comfortably hidden behind the façade of objectivity and universal truth (Hendrix, 2002; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), using the academic text to name, define, and thus control the world. Audre Lorde spoke at length about our need to honor that which is not necessary "logical" (i.e. masculinist) and is thus silenced, repressed, and prevents us from being in touch with our true selves. She cites poetry as a way to tap into our feelings, another legitimate way of knowing: "our feelings were not meant to survive…feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets" (Lorde, 2007, p. 39). With this understanding, and acknowledging that many of the community members in my research were denied their humanity and their pain was dismissed in the name of so-called facts, creative writing is weaved through out this paper as an epistemological tool and as an intervention against the monopoly of the academic register over legitimized knowledge.

Thus, my exercise in activist-scholarship in the present text manifests as follows. 1) In the face of a discourse that pretends neoliberal school reform applies to and benefits all Puerto Ricans equally, I help uncover the ways racial minorities, poor Puerto Ricans, and Puerto Rican women are disproportionately targeted for dispossession and for the stripping of the often limited power they have enjoyed. 2) Recording and analysis of the historical moment to capture resistance efforts and prevent the future depolitization of the history of public education in Borikén. 3) Highlighting and providing scholarly support for the political contributions of school communities, especially as Puerto Rican working

class women were contradicted, vilified, or altogether ignored by the state. 4) Offering a model of poetry as a decolonial epistemological tool.

Methodology

This is an interdisciplinary research project that combines a variety of methods. In order to ground my research in the its geopolitical location, the current historical moment, and existing scholarly work, a review of relevant literature was conducted. Works consulted mainly pertained to the historical record of education in Borikén and to the implementation of neoliberal policies in the realm of education, both in the United States and throughout the world.

Ethnographic research constitutes a fundamental part of my methodology in order to approach the experiences and perspectives of those directly affected by the turn of events in Puerto Rico's public education, both of which are seldom covered in-depth in mainstream media. I undertook field research in the summer of 2018 the Puerto Rican municipalities of San Juan, Dorado, and Levittown (although to a lesser extent) lasting about 4 weeks. San Juan was selected because all teacher and school principal unions are located in this city, as well as the Departmento de Educación headquarters and all the main governmental buildings, making it a common site for political actions. Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera (LMR) in Dorado and Escuela Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano (LRA) in Levittown, on the other hand, surfaced as other important field locations once I had begun fieldwork. I learned about the campamentos taking place at these school sites through activists' social media posts and through collaborators' suggestions; the welcoming environment and proximity to my lodging made it a relatively accessible location for me.

During this period, I carried out participant-observation sessions in various sites and events, including school campamentos, demonstrations, workshops, community meetings, and informal gatherings. This also included documentation in the form of audio recording, photos, filming, and collection of media (e.g. flyers, posters) whenever possible. Exploratory interviews also took place with collaborators prior to fieldwork, which often led to interviewees recommending other possible participants, also known as "snowball sampling." Several formal and semi-formal interviews took place once on field site. Altogether, about 11 long-form interviews (30 minutes or longer) were made.

A wide range of media outlets and mediums were consulted with the objective of understanding the discursive frameworks employed by the state to promote dispossession and privatization policies in public education, as well as the public's responses and narratives. These included contemporary news stories, social media discussions, official documents and press releases, and media pieces concerning school closures and education reform. Especially relevant units that were ephemeral in nature were archived (e.g. social media comments), while media in video form were transcribed. Furthermore, ever since the inception of this project in early 2018, I have been following or interacting in social media with educators, students, parents, and activists in the field. Beyond providing "raw data," their sharing of perspectives, experiences, and news via social media was instrumental in guiding my investigation and keeping me informed about developments both "on the ground" and in the mainstream political sphere.

Lastly, part of my field documentation and reflection process was executed in the form of creative pieces, namely poetry. The use of this recording and analysis method in the field was an intentional choice given that it was already part of my toolkit as cultural

worker, and that it allowed me to deepen my engagement and understanding of my environment. In addition, as a communication form, creative writing enables the researcher to escape the straitjacket of academic protocols that shun ordinary forms of expression, including humor, poetic language, ambiguity, subjectivity, and shifts in voice, among others. In short, non-academic writing allows for an expansion in register that reveals the humanity of the researcher(s) and collaborators, and potentially the reader.

Organization

The first chapter of this project highlights the patterns of colonialism in the establishment of a public education system under U.S. occupation, and which extend to this day in the advent of the 2018 education reform law. This section reviews existing literature and documents that trace the inception of public education in Puerto Rico, and compares its themes with the most recent literature regarding school closures and privatization in education, as well as those found in my own research data. It is demonstrated that by influencing public education, political elites have sought to maintain patriarchal, white supremacist structures. Chapter two engages with the framing that the Puerto Rican state employs to gain favor for its education policies among the general public. Specifically, through a review of Governor Rosselló's and Secretary of Education Julia Keleher's media appearances, speech events, and social media posts, we find that colonial tropes are recycled to make neoliberal models acceptable and even attractive. The third chapter delves into some of the way communities responded to the measures taken by the Departamento de Educación, with a special focus on a school campamento that sought to fight its school's closure. I demonstrate that the women involved in this form of protest highlighted the importance of the *escuelita* in working

class Puerto Rican neighborhoods, challenged traditional notions of activism, and created a space where individuals could shed a dehumanizing logic espoused by the state. I weave poetry of my authorship throughout this investigation, including found poems[16] using original interview transcripts and field notes.

Researcher Background

For the sake of transparency, it is equally important to discuss my background and motivations as a researcher approaching the present topic. I am a Mexican-born queer, cis-gender, light-skinned mestiza. Though white individuals in the U.S. generally read me as Latina, often asking about my accent's "origin," I have been mistaken for a white U.S. national by other people of color.

I am an undocumented immigrant living in the U.S. My legal status has acutely restricted my mobility, and by extension, has highly influenced my research areas (both geographical and thematic). My first language is Spanish and learned English upon migrating to the U.S. I lived in a Southern California town for 17 years, surrounded by mostly Mexican, Mexican-American, Central American, and Black community members. This means that while I am fully bilingual in English and Spanish, I still have much to learn about Puerto Rican colloquialism, idioms, and cultural references.

Because critical, socially-committed education has helped liberate me from oppressive ideologies, and because I experienced numerous barriers in accessing

[16] Found poetry is a type of text-based collage, where an author alters an existing text (usually via deletions and alteration of spacing) to yield a poem.

quality educational opportunities as an undocumented youth, education and young people have been a core element in my life and work. Although I do not have any formal teaching certification, I have worked with underserved youth and children for ten years leading workshops, facilitating activities, teaching courses, writing curriculum, coordinating programs and conferences, tutoring, mentoring, coaching, and organizing. At the same time, I have dedicated considerable time to organizing around issues of accessibility, affordability, and equity in higher education, especially pertaining low-income and undocumented youth, which often overlapped with immigrant rights advocacy. Later, I participated in grassroots environmental justice organizing and cultural work efforts in my community. These experiences have given me valuable insight into organizing, social change, policy analysis, and what it means to be a socially committed student-educator.

I had the chance to make a group visit to Puerto Rico for the first time in spring 2017 as part of Dr. Edith Wolfe's Tulane University graduate course titled "Women, Community, and Art in Latin America: Puerto Rico." Having spent considerable time learning about Puerto Rico and having made bonds with artists and community members, I was inevitably compelled to follow news stories closely when hurricane Maria struck in September 2017. This is how I became aware of the Rosselló administration plans to revamp its Department of Education as soon as they were announced. Having lived in New Orleans and being aware of its school district's reconfiguration into a charter model soon after Hurricane Katrina, I was understandably struck by the parallels and disturbed by the proposal's timing. Seeing the immediate reactions from public education leaders and empathizing with their

concerns, I wanted to understand the issue deeper and help document these developments. Thanks to the guidance from my mentor and advisor, Dr. Mohan Ambikaipaker, the instrumental support from Puerto Rican teachers, and an award from the Stone Center Field Research Grant, I was able to travel to Puerto Rico and conduct field research in the summer of 2018. From the onset, my goal was to better understand the changes in public education at a ground level, and capture the experiences and perspectives of frontline communities. I hope this work serves its purpose and proves insightful and inspiring for all who care deeply about public education, working-class women, and youth.

PART I. HISTORICAL AND DISCURSIVE CONTEXT

"No le están cerrando las escuelas a blanquitos"[17]: Patriarchal White Supremacist Reiterations in Puerto Rico's Education Reform

Introduction

We are sitting under the canopy at the Luis Muñoz Rivera campamento, it's about 7 of us at that time of the day. I am still getting to know the group and have lots of questions for them. The conversation turns to the topic of charter schools, and I tell them I've been very interested in learning more about them. Brenda, one of the mothers who has been leading the effort and who I later find out is part of the LMR school council, asks me what I have found out about them. I mention that I recently read a study about how charter school boards do not tend to reflect the local school communities, and often have white males overrepresented.[18] "¡Hmp, olvídate!...¡Mujer, y negra!" (Pff, forget it!...Woman, and Black!), she replies half-jokingly, referencing the poor odds she would face as a Black woman accessing a leadership position in such a charter school scenario.

* * *

This chapter provides a historically grounded overview of the ways in which racism and patriarchy continue to converge in the creation, justification, and implementation of education policy in Puerto Rico. I argue that the 2018 education reform and the massive school closures that accompanied it work together to reproduce racial inequalities that economically and politically disempower Puerto Rican working-class women, a legacy that can be traced back to at least the U.S. invasion of Borikén at the turn of the twentieth century. First, I trace how the roots of the Puerto Rican public school system were part of a patriarchal Anglo white

[17] "They aren't closing little white kids' schools"
[18] See Lay and Bauman's study of New Orleans charter schools' board representation (2017).

supremacist project attempting to create "tropical Yankees"[19] and advance U.S. political and economic interests. Second, I demonstrate the way Puerto Rico's latest adoption of neoliberal policies in public education is a re-iteration of this same white patriarchal global order, which in this case, profits from the subjugation of working-class Puerto Rican communities, and especially poor women and afrodescendientes.

By asking the questions "what role does race play in the changes taking place in the public education system and in its potential implications?" And, "what does a gender analysis tell us about the dynamics and potential effects of the recent policies in Puerto Rican education?" we can delve deeper into the issue at hand and go beyond the mainstream debate concerning education reform and school closures in Puerto Rico. In doing so, this study also serves to build on existing research regarding U.S. imperialism and neocolonialism in Borikén tracing a history that leads its education system today. This intersectional lens will allow me to bring together race and gender focuses in the study of neoliberalism that, unfortunately, are either grossly disregarded (Karatani, 2018; Ravitch, 2013) or that are considered in isolation (Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Robert, 2016). By neoliberalism I mean "a cluster of policies driven by the logic of transnational capitalism: unfettered world markets for goods and capital; pared down state responsibilities for social welfare of its citizens; opposition to conflictive and inefficient collective entitlements…[and] resolution of social problems through the application of quasi-market principles revolving around the primacy of the individual" (Hale, 2002, p. 486). In identifying and making explicit the role that race and gender play in neoliberal

[19] In his analysis of U.S. educational policies of "assimilation, Americanization and de-Puerto Ricanization," author José-Manuel Navarro uses the term "tropical Yankee" to refer to the attempt to turn Puerto Ricans into "the Caribbean variants of the native-born white Citizens" of continental U.S (2002, p.195).

educational reforms in general, I intentionally reject the limitations imposed by political and economic discussions that implicitly occult how different forms of domination are at work. Lastly, having Puerto Rico as the stage on which these dynamics take place is a significant aspect of this research. Puerto Rico's exceptional geopolitical stance –as a Caribbean and Latin American nation, and U.S. territory at once—, culture, and history, make this region a unique arena to observe just about any socipolitical phenomena. Moreover, as climate change threatens to increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, especially in vulnerable areas of the world , understanding Puerto Rico's policy measures, application, and effects in the wake of hurricane Maria, is not only necessary but urgent. The above concerns, together with the rapid rise of privatization models in education throughout the world (Busch, 2017; Giroux, 2014; Puiggrós, 1999; Robert, 2016; Shear, Hyatt, & Wright, 2015) make this study distinctive and highly relevant to educators, families, researchers, education advocates, and policymakers alike.

The Foundations of Public Education Under U.S. Control (1900-1950)

> *If the public school system is left to inefficiency and neglect, the awakening of the people will be indefinitely postponed…If the schools are made American and the teachers and pupils are inspired with the American…the island will become in its sympathies, views and attitudes toward life and towards government essentially American.*
>
> -Victor Clark, U.S. appointed President of Puerto Rico's Education Council, 1902[20]

In order to truly grasp what lies beneath the changes underway in the Puerto Rican system of public education, we must consider these processes within a larger temporal

[20] Pamphile, 2008, p. xvi

and geopolitical context. I begin with the racialized inception of the current system of education in Borikén, and trace it to the neoliberal policies that have attempted to impose a *relatively* new state of affairs.

When the U.S. invaded and took control of Puerto Rico in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War, one of the main goals it pursued was to expand the system of education as a means to facilitate a massive "Americanization" process. This statement is neither hyperbolic nor unfounded; Puerto Rican historians have demonstrated how this goal (increasing school access) and its objective (Americanization) was clearly articulated and reinforced by the Island's U.S. ruling officials in the early 1900's (del Moral, 2013a; Epstein, 1970; Negrón de Montilla, 1977; Stratton, 2016). Every appointed U.S.-born education commissioner in Borikén aggressively advanced three key objectives behind a grand educational colonial project: using the school system to lessen an "inferior" *puertorriqueñidad* (Puerto Ricanness) and increase or accelerate Americanization; prioritize English-only policies; and import models, educators, and other "experts" to replace and train the "deficient" existing school conditions and their local professionals.

Under the banner of what some regard as a soft colonialism, both military officials and education commissioners (which at times also had military backgrounds) expressed a desire to bestow upon Puerto Ricans the gifts of modernity and liberalism that according to them had been denied by their former Spanish rulers. "We have not come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property," expressed Major-General Nelson A. Miles upon assuming control of the Island in 1898 (Karl Stephen,

1907, p. 33). One of the education commissioners in Puerto Rico echoes the same paternalistic sentiment as he envisions the proliferation of schools: "Put an American schoolhouse in each valley and upon every hilltop in Porto Rico, and in these place the well-fitted and accomplished American school-teachers, and the cloud of ignorance will disappear as the flog flies before the morning sun" (War Department, 1899, p. 53). The imposed U.S.-born white male leadership that amassed unprecedented power[21] to dictate the course of the educational project in Puerto Rico differed slightly in methods, but were all unified under the goal of expanding education as a means to civilize and Americanize the children of Puerto Rico (Negrón de Montilla, 1977). This effort required a process of removing or destabilizing the existing structures that had been established on the Island via school closures, revocation of teachers' certification and denial of remuneration for their service, and the dissolving of municipal organizational structures that supported local schools (including school boards made up of local residents) (del Moral, 2013a; Epstein, 1970; Negrón de Montilla, 1977).

A key feature of schooling under U.S. tutelage was the push for teaching English and using English in the classroom. Commissioners' approaches to this end varied: devoting a large proportion of instruction time to teaching English, the requirement of all instruction to be in English, prohibiting school newspapers to only be in Spanish, demanding that school staff communicate in English, and even requiring the establishment of English clubs for 8th-10th graders (1977). Schools were one of the many sites were a ruthless, silencing wave of Americanization took shape. The 1900 Foraker Act, for example,

[21] Increased centralization of the public education system was a key feature of the U.S. administration on the Island, and the Education Commissioner eventually headed the department of education, the public university, while also being part of the gubernatorial executive committee.

demanded that all district and federal court proceedings in the island were to be carried out in English, and that only those who could read and write English could be candidates for the title of resident commissioner (1977).

Another important aspect of the Americanization process in schools was the import of U.S. teachers, models, experts, the training of Puerto Rican teachers by U.S. educators and institutions, and preferential treatment given to educators who adopted English and embraced Americanization. Since local schools, their staff, and educational programs were deemed subpar by the U.S. government, the massive hiring of English-speaking teachers/trainers of U.S. or English descent was pronounced necessary. At first, young men from the U.S. military occupying the island fulfilled this duty, followed by a huge import of U.S. young teachers (del Moral, 2013a; Negrón de Montilla, 1977). In 1900, U.S. appointed Governor Guy Henry would state in the annual report to the U.S. government that his administration "believed that only those who [spoke] English could explain lessons," and with financial and administrative cooperation from the municipalities, "[these teachers] could be brought from the United States" (1977, p. 26). Although municipalities failed to meet these requests, eventually, U.S. teachers –mostly white women-- were nevertheless imported to Puerto Rico, and English proficiency tests became a requirement for teacher certification, with scoring becoming a key element in hiring processes (López Laguerre, 1998, p. 4). In addition, education commissioner Brumbaugh pushed legislation that would financially support students to study in the U.S., while commissioner Lindsay organized "massive expedition" of Puerto Rican teachers to New England universities with the understanding that "participation would be a factor" in "granting teacher licenses (1977, p. 255). Brumbaugh also created 16 school

districts and appointed a U.S. supervisor to each, none of whom spoke Spanish (1977, p. 254). Moreover, the first thirty years of U.S. occupation also included the creation of teacher training institutions and the transformation of existing ones so that all new teachers would be trained in U.S. pedagogical models and values, and where special conferences could take place (del Moral, 2013a; Negrón de Montilla, 1977). Puerto Rican educators were thus expected to conform to new professional and pedagogical standards that would align with the goals of Americanization, following the lead of teachers, trainers, political leaders, and universities from the mainland.

The racial dimension of the sociopolitical venture represented by school expansion must be underscored, as it is both the logic of the colonization process and its justification. First, it must be understood that the U.S. and its officials clearly perceived Puerto Ricans as a racialized other, which was arguably based on multiple assumptions. For one, Puerto Ricans were considered the inheritors of a subpar civilization: the Hispanic roots of Puerto Rico were not only considered biologically and culturally different but inferior. Alamo-Pastrana explains that even before the invasion, "popular depictions characterized Puerto Rico as a backward society inhabited by Black children" (2016, p. 6). As such, Borikén presented itself not simply as an occupation of new territory and economic exploitation, but as a racialized colonial project. U.S. officials questioned whether "Puerto Ricans were capable of overcoming the intellectual and moral deficiencies assumed to shape the non-Anglo-Saxon peoples" in spite of of their best efforts to "civilize" them (del Moral, 2013a, p. 26). Borikén had become known throughout the colonial world as distinctively racially mixed (Dungy, 2014; Lloréns, 2018). Despite early attempts to whiten the population (through immigration and the

valorization of whiteness), an 1899 census conducted by the U.S. Department of War reported that about 40% of the island was reported as non-white (Loveman & Muniz, 2007). A representation of the Puerto Rican population in the U.S. imaginary in the wake of invasion can be found in the famous 1899 political cartoon "School Begins" (Dalrymple, 1899), which depicts Puerto Rico as a dark-skinned "Lilliputian" body, along with Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawai'i. Thus whether Borikén was perceived to be mostly white, mixed, or mostly brown or Black, it was nevertheless not Anglo-Saxon and by extension, were certainly perceived as inferior. The state of the education system in 1898, with about 1:10 literacy rate and rampant lack of access to education seemed to be in line with common stereotypes of [former] colonial subjects, and they painted an image that was widely circulated in political and academic literature during the first half of the twentieth century (del Moral, 2013a; Lewis, 1955; Negrón de Montilla, 1977; Stratton, 2016). Consequently, the low literacy levels and lack of adequate schools were used as a primordial piece of evidence for the *need* to apply the "benevolent colonialism" treatment. In his annual report to the President in 1899, Brigadier-General Davis goes so far as to state that "[i]f the percentage of those who are not able to read and write was as small as that of those who [could]," he would have had "the greatest pleasure in recommending" immediate autonomy to the Island (Puerto Rico., Davis, & United States., 1900, p. 5). The primitive intellectual development of Puerto Ricans, the U.S. argued, was directly tied to their status as a colonial subject: "[the proposed government] provides for as large a measure of self-government as the Puerto Ricans are capable of using wisely" (Karl Stephen, 1907, p. 81). Thus perceived cultural, social, and biological deficiencies were upheld by pointing at the unmet standards of U.S. intelligence and

ability (i.e. literacy levels and "proper" schooling), which in turn became the basis for an invasion and colonization that was not only acceptable but even righteous.

It could be tempting to adopt a pragmatic stance on the topic of the emergence of an education system under U.S. control—sure, their line of thinking was problematic, but officials meant well and a great social project was built, which benefitted millions as a result. While literacy is surely an essential skill and expanding access to educational opportunities is arguably a social good, the fact remains that developing a system of public education was merely a means to an end: to strengthen U.S. imperialism and keep an entire nation in a subservient position. It must keep in mind that even before the Spanish-American War, "the United States was already the main buyer of sugar produced on the island and its principal provider of merchandise" (Torres, 2016, para. 1). Schools served a practical purpose in furthering the economic and political clout of the U.S. as an emerging global power, and U.S. officials, along with the Puerto Rican Hispanic local elite, understood this. Education Commissioner Lindsay, for example, would state that education provided a much more efficient method of implementing U.S. imperialism: "colonization carried forward by the armies of war is vastly more costly than that carried forward by the armies of peace, whose outposts and garrisons are the public schools of the advancing nation"(as qtd. in J. Spring, 2018).

At its core, the Americanization process set out to change the "minds and hearts" of Puerto Ricans, not just their official language or pedagogical practices. All schools were thus required to champion a patriotic element: U.S. flags were flown in every schoolhouse, classes were required to sing the national anthem, the celebration of U.S. patriotic holidays was obligatory, and the honoring of U.S. presidents was instructed. The

U.S. was adamant about instilling patriotic sentiments to foster loyalty to the U.S. government and in turn, minimize the possibility of any insurrection (an effort that has been ongoing, as will be discussed later). Puerto Ricans, were often depicted by North Americans as docile and simple-minded, their children seen as "clean slates" that could be shaped into pawns of an imperial project (del Moral, 2013a). In his report, Education Commissioner Victor Clark reassures President McKinley of the great potential for submission behind the expansion of schools under the U.S.: "The great mass of Puerto Ricans are still passive and malleable…Their ideals are in our hands to create them and mold them" (Negrón de Montilla, 1977, p. 29). This appeasement of the colonial masses was vital to the long-term success of the U.S. in the dawn of expansionism, especially as the acquisition of territory and economic restructuring further dispossessed and impoverished the vast majority of Puerto Ricans. In the first decades of occupation, the U.S. depreciated the Puerto Rican currency by 40%, allowed U.S. corporations to dictate economic and political policy, left small farmers unable to compete and forced them to sell their lands, and the major industries (sugar, tobacco, and later, clothing) kept a large laboring class in poverty wages(Torres, 2016). The American school came at a high cost.

We see, then, that the foundations of the public education system in Borikén did not break away from oppressive paradigms in a mission for democracy and intellectual development, but rather enabled the reproduction social, racial, and economic hierarchical structures. One of the most obvious ways in which this took place, as suggested earlier, was through the imposition of a patriarchal, militaristic Anglo administration of the system of education, which overrode the power of a newly-racialized Puerto Rican political elite. The colonial government's appointment system

guaranteed that for almost 50 years, a white male from continental U.S. would dictate who should oversee the highly centralized educational affairs in the Island. Education institutions and leadership under Spanish rule were male-dominated as well, and female educators had been paid, by decree, a third less than their male counterparts (Navarro, 2002). Both in continental U.S. and in Puerto Rico, the opening of the profession to women was a result not of an egalitarian spirit, but of the need to have more teachers for lower pay (Jabbar, Sun, Lemke, & Germain, 2018). Unfortunately, as the teaching profession in Puerto Rico became increasingly and overwhelmingly female (Merino Falú, 2004), it had limited power over shaping education policy (although their leverage increased with the inception of the first teachers' union [del Moral, 2013a, 2013b; Negrón de Montilla, 1977]). The identity politics at play hold deeper implications; the Anglo male leadership were the gatekeepers of who could have access to teaching positions and what ideologies reached the classroom. With the revocation of pre-invasion teaching certificates, the ability to award new teacher certification, dictate salaries, and hire teachers, the U.S. government held the power to exclude any [aspiring] educators who questioned its values and policies. For example, when a group of students at the normal school in Puerto Rico rejected Education Commissioner Huyke's extreme Americanization policies, he advised them not to dedicate themselves to teaching, "for although [he] could not take away their diplomas…[he would] not hire any teacher who does not think like the Department does" (Negrón de Montilla, 1977, pp. 271–272). While teaching had been largely a middle-class profession, new teacher certification requirements and training, especially English tests, imposed greater barriers for aspirants from more humble backgrounds. "Imported" U.S. teachers were paid significantly more

than local teachers, and local teachers who demonstrated proficiency in English language skills could expect greater chances of employability and higher pay than their non-English speaking colleagues, even in times when English-only education policies relaxed (Negrón de Montilla, 1977). In her study of Black Puerto Rican teachers during from 1900-1930, Merinu Falú argues that these protocols imposed great barriers for afrodescendiente women to enter the profession, and that they faced racial and class discrimination by working in poor conditions and receiving lower pay than their colleagues employed in more affluent areas (2004). Moreover, vocational skills and physical education programs were designed to foster particular, gendered notions of citizenship that aligned with U.S. values and benefitted the imperial project (Collazo, 1998; del Moral, 2013a). These gendered, racial paradigms existed thus at multiple levels. Puerto Rican students and educators were racialized in the context of continental United States affairs (e.g. by having teachers train in segregated Black or Native American schools, by having the Island's youth serve in segregated military troops), the U.S. cemented them into a subordinate position in a global racial order. Especially during times of war, the U.S. was able to tap into the educational sphere's structures, skills, and people power to fuel imperial economic and political agendas (1998). Overall, in exchange for limited literacy gains, the system of education created proved to be one racist, heteropatriarchal colonial structure *imbricated* with another one, thus further exacerbating inequalities. At the end of the day, the educational project erected was oriented towards the needs of U.S. empire, not the children of Puerto Rico.

A Turn to the Neoliberal World Order: From Colonial Subjects to Rational Actors

> *In developing countries, the educators…are key actors and they have often been called upon to lead their countries as they develop…They need the guidance of the men and women of the 'old country'…We, the North American educators, could and should constructively contribute to the development of nascent lands through sharing our own experiences and material resources.*
>
> -Professor Paul S. Welty, general secretary of the World Confederation of Teachers' Organizations, 1961 (as qtd. in Puiggrós, 1999, p. 33)

Despite U.S. officials' efforts to use schools as a means to turn Puerto Ricans into acquiescent "tropical Yankees" (Navarro, 2002), from the beginning, Puerto Rican teachers and university students were especially unwavering in contesting their exclusion from constructing colonial plans (del Moral, 2013a; Negrón de Montilla, 1977; Rey, 2008). The gradual waning of U.S. imported Anglo officials and teachers made way to the re-establishment of a local, patriarchal Hispano-descendant elite, although women continued to make up a majority in teaching positions. These shifts reflected changes in other social and political spheres across Puerto Rico. To be sure, the U.S. imperial state and its allied corporations continued to have undue, even supreme, political and economic power over Borikén, but a Puerto Rican elite had re-emerge and assumed a managerial-type role over the masses. With the granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans (conveniently preceding WWII's military draft), and the establishment of the "Estado Libre Asociado" (Commonwealth) in 1950, Puerto Ricans intensified their search for a national identity while different political factions articulated their visions of autonomy. As the second half of the twentieth century advanced, the prevalence of deep inequities raised increasingly pressing questions about the inadequacies of the modern capitalist system (Puiggrós, 1999). The wave of revolutionary and left-wing governments

that swept Latin America and the Caribbean in the 50's and 60's,[22] alarmed Western powers. While the U.S. certainly did everything it could to provide military and financial support to local white and mestizo elites in their attempts to thwart or overthrow leftist powers in the Americas,[23] the elites of the world also looked to education to supplement their efforts (Klein, 2010; Puiggrós, 1999). Puerto Rico remained in the field of view: "American policy analysts visualized Puerto Rico as the antisocialist model for countries in transition from the clutches of traditional colonial domination" (Alamo-Pastrana, 2016, p. 88). Through special partnerships with U.S. academic institutions (especially the University of Chicago, UC Berkeley, and Columbia) and financial support from the US government and foundations, students from Chile, Indonesia, and Puerto Rico, among others, were trained in Friedman economics[24] and were encouraged to use their home countries as "laboratories" of economic policy (Alamo-Pastrana, 2016; Klein, 2010).

Argentinian education scholar Adriana Puiggrós, analyzes the way conservative members of the Puerto Rican intellectual elite joined other leaders to discuss the role of education in a changing world (1999). In an international meeting in Kansas in 1961, University of Puerto Rico (UPR) chancellor (1942-1966) Jaime Benítez reminded his colleagues that "embracing the cause of social change" was one that "so naturally belongs to the educated," and must not fall into the wrong hands (p. 32). Benítez's urgent

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[22] This included Puerto Rico's fervent nationalist party. In 1954, four members of the party led by Lolita Lebrón opened fire at the U.S. House of Representatives, injuring five legislators.

[23] See, for example, McPherson's *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2016) or Chomsky's *Turning the Tide (2015)*.

[24] Milton Friedman was the leading voice in "extreme laissez faire" economics during the second half of the twentieth century. According to his theory, the economy works best if it is left completely alone and there is no government interference. As such, minimum wages, bank regulation, and labor unions were seen as detrimental to a healthy economy. Although his theories were regularly challenged and proven wrong, they still deeply influence policy-making to this day (Palley, 2006).

call to "'depoliticize' society and education" (p. 32) likely reflected the growing social unrest he saw around him, including a fierce pro-independence nationalist movement, and strong student and labor activism in his own backyard (UPR). Unfortunately, despite multiple social demands for change and a continued growth of the education sector(Collins, Bosworth, & Soto-Class, 2006), the public education structure that the U.S. built went largely untouched for most of the second half of the twentieth century.

Signs of significant change were in the horizon with the approval of the first major educational reform in Borikén, which would come to be known as the Ley Orgánica (or Organic Law) of 1990. The passage of this law is as remarkable for the support and consultation process it enjoyed, as it is for the progressive changes it proposed amidst the "multidimensional crisis" that had begun to take shape since the 70's (Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico, 2018, p. 8). As revised in 1999, the Ley Orgánica sought to decentralize the Department of Education by creating seven regional areas; designating schools as autonomous "community schools"; and requiring each school to form a school board with staff, parent, student, and community representation that would decide on the school's academic, fiscal, and administrative affairs (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 1999). Despite its great potential, little changed. Teachers complained that the law was never implemented and the DEPR refused to give up the centralized powers it had enjoyed for so long (Nieves Torres, 2018). Soon, Puerto Rico became subject to politicians' critiques and public outcry over the deficiencies of its public education system, not unlike the sudden negative spotlight on predominantly Black schools in Chicago, D.C., and New York. Just as Puerto Rican schools at the turn of the twentieth century had a special place in the vision of U.S. empire (as makers of "tropical

Yankees"), they would be re-imagined in a new project of capitalist white supremacy, as products and customers of a neo-colonial marketplace.

Making Disasters in Poor and Afrodescendientes' Communities

During one of my more formal interviews in the span of my fieldwork, I had a chance to speak with Shariana Ferrer, a leader from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, an anticapitalist feminist organization fighting anti-Black violence and patriarchy. I was curious to hear the Colectiva's perspective on my topic of investigation given that they were one of the only grassroots groups that were drawing attention to the intersection of gender, race, and neoliberalism. I was in for a treat, but more specifically, I was about to "get schooled." My question about whether she felt neoliberal reforms were a so-called "assault on the middle class" were met with a questioning of "the middle class." "Parametros que han establecido el capitalismo para tratar de generar un distanciamiento o la falsa idea de una mobilidad social" (*It's a parameter established by capitalism to create distance and the false idea of social mobility)*, Sharia suggested. It's about the deployment of a panic over a group of people suddenly having to live like the vast majority of poor people, especially poor and Black people, she continued.

As our conversation turned to focus on education, she once again drew on her insight as a community member of a predominantly Black neighborhood: "no le están cerrando las escuelas a blanquitos" (They are not closing the schools on little white children). A bulb in my head went off, and I was embarrassed at how simple my race analysis had been up to that point, failing to recognize familiar patterns in

the ways racism had been manifesting before me. I had been spending the past few weeks visiting campamentos where the proportion of dark-skinned Boricuas was in sharp contrast to the light-skinned people that surrounded me in the affluent neighborhood of Miramar (where I rented). At my rental unit in San Juan, it was dark-skinned Dominican women that would come do housekeeping, and a dark-skinned man who did landscaping in the heat of the summer. It was an upper middle-class light skinned Puerto Rican family who owned the huge house where I rented a room, and who had sent their three daughters to Ivy leagues schools. While Shariana's comment was barely the second time that someone had even *mentioned* race during my fieldwork, I had plenty of ethnographic evidence and historical antecedents to support her argument. It made sense-- the toll of this so-called transformation in education was being borne by the most marginalized sectors of Puerto Ricans, poor [and] Black communities, while those who were spared or benefitted most were more predominantly more affluent Euro-descendants. My interviewee's insight and unconstrained commitment to naming things for what they were was instrumental in the direction that my research would take.

As my first visit to one of the campamentos suggests at the beginning of this paper, a central issue in the resistance to school closings and education reform was the quality of imposition and exclusion. Not unlike the U.S. military government's sudden ordering to build schools and the dictation of its pedagogical priorities in 1898 that excluded local stakeholders, Puerto Rico's Department of Education advanced its agenda without consulting Puerto Rican communities. Interestingly, it was Julia Keleher, a private school educated white woman from Pennsylvania with

no classroom experience, who was selected by Governor Rosselló to head the DEPR and carry out the mission. It is significant that although Puerto Rico's teacher union faction has been severely fractured in the past two decades, all five unions representing school teachers and principals denounced the lack of debate around the reforms and school closures, and their exclusion from these decision-making processes. The selection of schools to be closed was an especially obscure and arbitrary process. Parents and educators often complained that the selection did not seem to follow any established protocols or defined processes of evaluation. "To this day, we have not been given a list of criteria," campamentos participants would tell me; other affected teachers and parents agreed (Noticias Salinas, 2018). They denounced that there was no previous consultation process, dialogue, or even clear justification. Their experiences contradicted the current Secretary of Education Julia Keleher's statements that schools were being evaluated on the condition of the buildings and their enrollment (Figuero Cancel, 2018b), which also stood at odds with the many schools that were ordered to close despite adequate conditions and meeting the set enrollment quota. Stories of school personnel, students, and parents suddenly finding out their schools would not reopen at the next school year were not uncommon, both in my fieldwork experience and in the media (Acevedo & Gamboa, 2018). During a radio interview, one mother shared that she had found out about the plans to close her school not from the school itself nor the Departmento de Educación, but on social media ("Radio Isla," 2018).

But in addition to a violent process of dispossession and political exclusion, the DEPR chose to devalue the valuable input and knowledge that school

communities could contribute to the re-imagining of their schools and the public education system overall. Consider, for example, that while many of the teachers at Luis Muñoz Rivera and Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano had decades-long, esteemed careers in their schools, they were not asked to partake in the evaluation of their school or possible solutions to identified issues. Similarly, although parents, students, and neighbors across Puerto Rico displayed incredible solidarity and organization in restoring their schools post-Maria recovery efforts in the absence of government relief (Meléndez García, 2017b; ORP-AMPR, 2017), their aptitudes and knowledge of the school community were disregarded. Thus, while Keleher reiterated in the press that the Department was listening and collaborating with people on the ground, this sound bite did not hold water for the vast majority of Puerto Ricans directly experiencing school closures. Even as communities and educators attempted to voice their concerns using all platforms at their disposal, it was evident that their talking points were secondary to the supremacy of the current "economic conditions" and limited resources. Keleher capitalized on her role as "legitimate expert" and identified a problem (i.e. poor spending and administration) and a set of solutions; school communities could now be recipients and executioners of a blueprint they never helped design.

The 2018 education reform and complementary school closures are an example of David Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession," which refers to "the process by which capital cannibalizes spheres of production and social life that are public or held in common and turns them into commodities to be bought and sold in the market" (Lipman, 2015, p. 61). Accumulation by dispossession requires an

element of choice as they disproportionately prey on poor communities of color and ultimately benefit private interests of privileged backgrounds. Whereas public officials often point to the inevitability of adopting drastic measures in the face of natural disasters, whether environmental or economic in character, I join other scholars in pointing to the deliberate dimensions of these phenomena and their treatment. One of the questions I often asked Puerto Ricans in the interviews I conducted was whether they felt the latest wave of school closures and the 2018 education reform had been triggered by hurricane Maria. I had learned about the way New Orleans Parish had dismantled its public education system and fired all its teachers in the wake of Katrina to quickly make way for the biggest charter school experiment[25] in the nation. Naomi Klein referred to New Orleans as an instance of "disaster capitalism" where "orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities"(Klein, 2010, p. 6), and several pieces analyzing the situation in Puerto Rico made similar references to this dynamic (Chávez & Cohen, 2017; Goldstein, 2017).

I wanted to learn more about the way Puerto Ricans themselves perceived this assault in their public education system as it related (or not) to Maria. While there was some variation in their responses, none of my interviewees attributed the changes to the recent environmental disaster. Rather, they spoke of a *destape*, or uncovering/unveiling

[25] Scholars (Lipman, 2011; Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010) and public school advocates in New Orleans alike have emphasized the experimental nature of the charter school model. Indeed, Louisiana's R.S. 17§3972 notes as its purpose "to authorize experimentation by city and parish school boards" (in reference to charter schools). Further, "it is the intention of the legislature to provide a framework for such experimentation by the creation of such schools, a means for all persons with valid ideas and motivation to participate in the experiment, and a mechanism by which experiment results can be analyzed, the positive results repeated or replicated, if appropriate, and the negative results identified and eliminated" (Louisiana State Legislature, 1995).

of the inequities that had already existed in Puerto Rico for so long. Others referred to the many signs of "planning" that had been evident even before Maria: school closures and attempted school closures, restructuring the school's grade system, deep cuts to higher education, and changes to the retirement system of public employees. To speak of a *destape* or of a pre-existing *planning* process, at least in the last several years, was to go beyond notions of "disaster capitalism" where entities exploit a given situation. Instead, the case of Puerto Rico seemed to exemplify a dynamic of human-facilitated disaster to produce lucrative business opportunities, rather than crises and states of alarm founded on natural occurrences. In the field of education specifically, researchers have found patterns of government neglect and disinvestment in public schools, which give rise to an academic underperformance that is then exploited in campaigns that call for immediate and drastic policy measures (e.g. school closures, mayoral control) (A. Brown, 2015; Lipman & Jenkins, 2011; Picower & Mayorga, 2015). As I will try to demonstrate below, the assault on public education that Puerto Rico experienced in the past few years rests heavily on the racialization and gendering of its school communities, and is thus, to a large extent, a reproduction of the colonial school paradigm of early twentieth century.

I once again invoke the concept of racial imbrications (Alamo-Pastrana, 2016) to bring attention to the different layers and interactions of race in this dynamic of accumulation by dispossession, and stress that the information presented must be considered in light of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship to the U.S. That is, it is not a mere case of *x happened in Puerto Rico*, but rather *x happened in a U.S. territory because the Puerto Rican elite and the U.S. state have allowed this to happen*.

While data on the number of afrodescendientes affected by school closures is not available, nor has the DEPR taken interest in this researching this topic, we can assess the impact of school closures on the most economically disadvantaged sectors of the population. As suggested above, given that Puerto Ricans of African descent continue to experience structural racism directly impacting their economic opportunities, health outcomes, and political participation, economically disadvantaged schools may be serving disproportionate numbers of students from this social group. Using statistics from the DEPR's data library updated in August of this year, I calculated the proportion of public schools still operating with a high-poverty (75% or more) student population that is living below the federal poverty line for the 2016-2017 school year. I then made the same calculations but for the list of schools listed as no longer open. Lastly, to get a base "average," I did the same calculations combining both, currently operating and recently closed schools. While the data lists a total of 1143 schools, 30 of these did not show data regarding family income and were excluded from calculating percentages. The results are shown in the Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1
High-poverty schools in Puerto Rico. Author's graphic representation from raw data (Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico, 2018a)

	Combined sample (operating and recently closed)	**Public schools allowed to operate**	**Public schools ordered to close**
Total number of schools (with full data sets)	1113	820	293
Number of high-poverty schools	857	598	260
Proportion of high-poverty schools	75%	73%	88.7%

As the table above demonstrates, although the vast majority of public schools are considered high-poverty institutions, there is a significant difference in the way school closings were distributed. High-poverty schools were significantly more likely to close than their counterparts. In addition, a review of the Departmento's schools, test scores, and poverty rates demonstrated that specialized public schools (i.e. magnet schools) are extremely unrepresentative of the overall public school student body, disproportionately serving students above the poverty line. The University Gardens school in San Juan or the newly opened CROEM in Ceiba, for example, feature some of the highest standardized test scores in the Island, but only 27.8% and 27.3% of its students live below the poverty line, respectively (Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico, 2018a). Not surprisingly, these type of schools tend to have some of the best facilities, resources, academic programs, and test scores in the Island, and were thus never seriously considered for closure. By contrast, schools who served poor communities like Luis Muños Rivera and Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano, or even the John F. Kennedy school in Ponce (with impressive test scores across the board), all found their doors closed at the start of the 2018 school year. Moreover, a study by the Annie D. Casey Foundation found that in 2015, 58% of Puerto Rican children lived below the poverty line, compared to 21% of children in continental U.S (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

Thus although poor children in Puerto Rico are overrepresented in public schools (since many families that can afford tuition send their kids to private schools), no other state in continental U.S. has such a high number of children living in poverty. Consequently, it was those students who were already suffering extreme

hardship in their lives that were subject to school closures and the accompanying trauma. It was families who were already struggling to make ends meet, who had limited means of transportation, and who had the least means of bounceback after the hurricane that were suddenly burdened with either the task of fighting to keep their schools open or quietly enduring the stress that came with having to relocate their children. It was those communities who had less that were dispossessed of some of the only assets they were still afforded under the state, such as spaces of safe community building, resource-sharing, a culturally relevant education.

This type of dispossession in the most vulnerable sectors of Puerto Rico opened the door to a myriad of issues that are equally significant with the potential of deepening social and racial inequities. One of the most obvious of these consequences are the jeopardizing of the academic futures of the children affected by school closures. Having to travel greater distances was one of the most pressing concerns among parents and guardians who found out their children's schools were due to close. This is even more significant given the fact that Puerto Rico is notorious for not having a reliable or comprehensive transportation system, even in the San Juan metro area. One of the parents I spoke to at Luis Muñoz Rivera told me that because she had no means to drive her daughter to her assigned receiving school, she would be forced to homeschool her. Another person, an elderly woman who cared for her two granddaughters while their father worked in the U.S., told me in tears that if the school closed, she and her granddaughters would have to relocate to the U.S.

While these scenarios show families' commitments to ensuring their children have access to education, having the time to homeschool or the means to relocate to a

new city are unusual privileges for many working class parents. As such, it is hard to determine the effect that long commutes, no access to transportation, and other mental and emotional hardships will have on students who experienced school closures and forced relocations. Recent studies on the aftermath of school closures in Chicago show evidence that transitions processes were inadequately planned and chaotic in nature, that students whose schools closed experienced "a period of mourning" and rupture of social ties, high mobility rates among both incoming and receiving groups of students, lower GPA for students 3-4 years after relocation, and lower test scores among relocated students (Strauss, 2018). In addition, school closures in Puerto Rico have especially important consequences for democracy in the Island. As the vast majority of voting centers are set up in public schools, the fact that over 600 schools have been closed in the past 6 years or so, is concerning (López Alicea, 2017). This is especially salient in rural areas and among people who may not drive or have access to a vehicle, as public transportation is unavailable to the vast majority of Puerto Ricans. The State Election Commission is hurriedly working on a strategy to find solutions (Santiago, 2018), showing the DEPR's lack of consideration for the short- and long-term effects of their actions. As we can see, the systematic dispossession of poor Puerto Rican communities, while serious in it of itself, does not give us a comprehensive understanding of the spectrum of hardship, violence, and exclusion that it may bring.

Taxing Puerto Rican Working-Class Women for What They Didn't Buy

The intersection of gender and market solutions to public education issues is one area of analysis that has already begun to color a fuller picture of what is taking place in Puerto Rico's school system: the devaluing of women's labor, the feminization of poverty via the weakening of teachers' workers rights and benefits, and the increase of unpaid care work for women. A gender analysis is especially key when speaking of labor issues in the teaching profession as it is a majority-women occupation in most places in the world, including Puerto Rico. The DEPR reports that an overwhelming 80.5% of its public schools educators are women, and make up 90.2% at the pre-school level (Disdier Flores, 2016). Research on teachers in the neoliberal era reveals that care work, including teaching, has been historically feminized (i.e. associated with women and femininity) and poorly valued, which has resulted in lower pay (Jabbar et al., 2018; Warin & Gannerud, 2014). This devaluing of teachers' important labor and contributions to the Puerto Rican education system in the wake of school closures and education reform was apparent in a number of ways. News articles on the reform bill were often accompanied by public comments of the need to finally "crackdown" on overly compensated, irresponsible educators. Moreover, as previously discussed, educators were routinely and overwhelmingly left out of conversations to evaluate the condition of their workplace and ways to address identified issues. Despite the chaos and unfamiliarity that came with the sudden adoption of new hiring procedures, new use of technology, and abrupt relocations (triggered by school closings), teachers were met with contempt and indifference as they tried their best to adjust to a shifting work environment. Teachers sharing their stories of worker violations, disrespect, and desperate situations filled social media

and were confirmed by my collaborators: being offered positions requiring 2+hours of commute,[26] teachers receiving assignments that had nothing to do with their certifications or experience (e.g. a music teacher being offered to teach science), teachers approaching the start of the school year without being told whether they would have a job or not. In addition, teachers' long years of service have been continuously attacked, with a retiring system that has already faced serious cuts and is continually threatened.

Perhaps one of the biggest signs of the devaluing of Puerto Rican educators--in the guise of benevolent support--, was the promotion of the *Transición Voluntaria* (Voluntary Transition) program, which offered teachers up to one-year salary in exchange for their transition into the private sector (Oficina del Gobernador, n.d.). Though presented as a "voluntary" career change, women were in fact being disproportionately *pushed out* of one of the few lines of work that had been female-dominated, and that had afforded them relative job security and benefits. Demoralizing and abusive conditions in the DEPR, combined with the incentive to leave the teaching profession, meant that public school teachers were pushed into a private sector that had increasingly limited full-time employment opportunities with full benefits.[27] As the DEPR created favorable conditions for private entities to enter the public education sector, teachers could reasonably expect even more precarious work conditions, including short-term contract work (Robert, 2016), anti-union

[26] In addition to gas costs and vehicle wear and tear, commuting in Puerto Rico entails additional costs given that toll booths are common and numerous. Roads in the Island began to be privatized in the 1990's, a trend that continues to this day.

[27] A lack of jobs paying a living wage to Puerto Rican women is an especially pertinent issue in Puerto Rico as 59% of Boricua children live in a single-parent household (the highest rate of all U.S. regions) (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

workplaces (Montaño, 2016), more competitive work environments, and lower job satisfaction (Bell Weixler, Harris, & Barret, 2017). Neoliberal policies thus further deepened what had been a historically feminized, underpaid, and undervalued occupation, thus contributing to the feminization of poverty that Puerto Rican women already experience.

School closings and the accompanying education reform have also resulted in the increase of unpaid labor that has been largely absorbed by women, a trend likely to grow as the private sector continues to encroach on public education. As neoliberalism demands that the welfare state rolls back social services and safety nets, the continued creation of wealth "is achieved through the intensification of unwaged and waged labour of women" and the racialized, gendered creation of "'disposable' workers" (Kalpana Wilson 2015, p.808). To illustrate, one of the main concerns of parents and teachers opposing school closures and consolidations were the great distances they would have to travel. Although the DEPR promised a smooth transition and the expedient establishment of school bus routes to help families with transportation, to this day, that promise has not materialized. As women have been traditionally assigned the role of ensuring their children's education (Jabbar et al., 2018, p. 757), the emotional, mental, and physical labor of having to re-register children, tend to their emotional needs in a sudden transition, and transport them to a new school further from home, will disproportionately fall on them. Once again, because these type of measures (i.e. school closings, privatization) overwhelmingly target communities of color (Picower & Mayorga, 2015) it is women of color who are disproportionately affected by this increase in unpaid care labor. For educators,

scholars have found that market-based approaches to education, especially in the form of charter schools, tends to result in the following: increased uncompensated labor, longer work hours, and unrealistically high expectations that are especially stressful on teachers who are also mothers (A. Brown, 2015; Robert, 2016). This had already begun to take effect in Puerto Rico with the adoption of standardized testing and the micro-managing of school curricula that came with it. When I asked seasoned educators about what were some of the major changes they had experienced in their professional field, one common answer was "*el papeleo*" (the paperwork). *We are spending more time filling out papers than actually teaching*, some would tell me. In short, the invisible oil that keeps the wheels of racial capitalism functioning is female, and especially in the case of Puerto Rico, working class women.

Profiting an Old Boss: Puerto Rican Children as Products and Consumers

> *Our role is to serve as a catalyst of good ideas, driven by the same guiding principle we started with: all students – but especially low-income students and students of color – must have equal access to a great public education that prepares them for adulthood.*
>
> -Bill Gates, 2017

Scholars have spoken to the global adjustment period of the past few decades as numerous liberal governments of nation-states begin assuming more managerial roles while increasingly applying neoliberal policies; that is, a shift from *government* to *governance* (L. F. Aguilar, 2007; Lipman & Jenkins, 2011). In the governance era, "the 'managerial state' deploys business practices and metrics…to restructure public institutions for efficiency and effectiveness"(2011, p. 103). Although advocates of privatization in the form of school voucher programs and charter schools promote

education as the panacea to poverty and inequality, these policies effectively exacerbate racial, economic, and gender inequities (Jabbar et al., 2018; Lipman & Jenkins, 2011; Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Robert, 2016). Across the globe, education privatization models continue to enrich a global white elite class, and vesting in them the power to dictate what children should learn, how, and for what purpose (J. H. Spring, 2012). In the case of Puerto Rico, the recent school closures and school reform have disempowered school communities, stripped them of valuable public resources, and imposed models that further relegate them into positions of dependability and subordination in a white supremacist patriarchal global order.

The profiteers and potential profiteers of DEPR's school closures, high-stakes testing, school vouchers, and charter school proliferation are not the most destitute Puerto Rican families, but a global elite and Euro-descendant privileged classes in the Island. Vacated school buildings became abandoned sites of vandalism and drug use, or were rented at "liquidation prices" to private and non-profit entities. In one controversial case, the Puerto Rican government transferred a former school building for a $1.00 fee to a Christian school, who then established its own private school, "Fountain Christian Bilingual School" (Metro Puerto Rico, 2018b). It is no coincidence that as Governor Rosselló and the DEPR pushed to pass education reform and close hundreds of schools, previously protected lands became open for business (Alvarado León, 2018) and foreign investors poured in to attend high-end

real estate conferences.[28] While the government bent over backwards in its attempt to appeal to foreign investors and businesses,[29] it continued to neglect its local population and creating uninhabitable conditions for them. Multiple people expressed to me this sense of being pushed out of their communities by the government and a powerful financial elite. "Quieren vaciar la Isla" ("they want to empty the Island") one of them said, "quieren hacer la Isla inhabitable" ("they want to make the Island uninhabitable") an interviewee agreed. Indeed, as scholar Pauline Lipman outlines in *The New Political Economy of Urban Education,* the privatization of public school systems has advanced hand-in-hand with the restructuring of the larger urban landscapes in which they are embedded, paving the way for dispossession of poor communities of color and gentrification.

The education reform will also serve to further exacerbate the extraction of wealth of the Puerto Rican people to a handful of corporations mostly located in the global North with white male leadership. Because the reform makes evaluations through student standardized testing a central element of the measure, the testing industrial complex will continue to profit. UK-based companies like Pearson Learning and U.S.-based College Board are likely to make even larger profits as standardized testing becomes mandatory and as charter schools expand, which often use tests as part of their admission process. In 2011 alone Pearson obtained $21 million in contracts from DEPR (Quiles, 2013), a figure that is likely much higher

[28] In 2017, Puerto Rico hosted the "China Puerto Rico Investment Forum," and in 2018, Life Afar's "2018 Investors Conference." The "Puerto Rico Investment Summit" is scheduled for early in 2019, with José B. Carrión III, the President of Puerto Rico's Oversight Board, as one of the keynote speakers.
[29] For example, a 2014 law that rewards foreign investors who decide to permanently settle in the Island, and the designation of over 90% of the Archipelago as investor-friendly "opportunity zones."

today. This is especially problematic as research shows that high-stakes testing is a flawed and ineffective means of evaluation for both students and teachers (Ravitch, 2013), and that standardized testing results in discrimination against students of color (Picower & Mayorga, 2015). Standardized testing has a particularly dark history for Puerto Rican children, whose standardized test results in the wake of the eugenics movement was used by researchers as evidence of being "intellectually dull offspring" unable to adjust to a "complicated, highly organized civilization" (Stratton, p. 194). Today, companies like Pearson Learning and College Board promote their products under the premise of objectivity and claim to value diversity, but their work continues to function as a flawed gatekeeping tool against people of color. Moreover, whether private or non-profit in nature, they nevertheless collect millions of dollars for their overwhelmingly white male leadership,[30] and continue to promote their products despite the harm caused on students of color.

Puerto Rico's first charter school, which received its first class this past August, can be indicative of what may transpire in the Island as education reform takes shape and the charter model expands. Proyecto Vimenti, established by the Boys and Girls Club of Puerto Rico (BGCPR), opened its doors in the vicinity of Villa Prades in San Juan, near the affordable housing complex Ernesto Ramos Antonini. A school spokesperson stated that about 47% of the projected cost per pupil will come from the DEPR, and that its recruited teachers, who were not DEPR

[30] As of the date of this study, out of the fifteen board members of College Board, thirteen of them are white, and eleven of them are male; out of the twenty-one board members of Pearson Learning, twenty are white, and seventeen are male. While representation is important and can be reflective of an organization's values, the effects of such organization's work is ultimately what is most important.

employees, will be paid a $40,000 starting salary[31] (Acevedo, 2018). Such salary and benefits, while attractive, stand in shaky ground as new charter school employees are usually not protected by unions, and wages and work conditions are likely to suffer as charter schools expand and competition ensues. After all, as stated earlier, it was the feminization of teaching and proliferation of schools that drove teacher wages down. It is interesting that Puerto Rico's first charter school's focus is on tourism, while also proudly stating that it is a bilingual school (Salamán, 2018). Activists and scholars have pointed to the way the privatization of public schools have allowed corporations and wealthy philanthropists to shape school curriculum in a way that trains workers according to market needs, rather than according the creative, social, emotional, and intellectual needs of students. Entities of these ranks are "[p]rimarily concerned with economic growth and stable global economic systems…[and focus] on how education can contribute to these ends" (J. H. Spring, 2012, p. 24). In an unabashed example of public schools at the service of a wealthy global elite, the Vimenti charter school has installed mock hotel bedrooms and phones "where [students'] parents practice how to make bends and answer the phone, so they can eventually get jobs in the hotel and hospitality sector" (Maxwell, 2018). Whereas U.S. imperialism sought to strengthen the nation-state via territorial expansion and cheap resource extraction, the contemporary global elite is invested in the creation of markets and low-wage workers. A school dedicated to training children in the tourist sector is thus an appropriate complement to a government-sponsored project of luring

[31] $40,000 is double the starting salary of the average Puerto Rican teacher ("Información sobre salario en Puerto Rico para Maestros de Escuela Secundaria en Mi Próximo Paso," n.d.).

foreigners into relocating to the island and the selling public lands. The Puerto Rican political elites continue to act as intermediaries and guide the public school system to be at the service of a global, predominantly white elite.

Vimenti espouses another key trend of the school choice movement and the billionaires that support it: the idea that providing educational choices to poor students is the silver bullet to lifting them from poverty. BGCPR's chief executive states, "We are not creating a school as a response to the Education Reform, what this attempts is to break the generational cycle of poverty. This is a unique product of the conditions that have developed in Puerto Rico" (Salamán, 2018, author's translation). Embedded in this ideology is a myth that decades of education research has proven wrong (Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Ravitch, 2013)[32]-- that poverty can be fixed as long as we have "good schools." Failure to recognize the interconnectedness of institutions and the multitude of factors that keep individuals in situations of poverty demonstrates a narrow understanding of education's important but limited role in society. More importantly, such line of thinking is a reformulation of age-old paradigms that blame victims for their own oppression, for who is there to blame when a school hires well-qualified teachers and provides all children with iPads, yet still close the school year with poor standardized test scores?

The rise of the venture philanthropists like Gates, Bloomberg, and Broad, fund school choice and voucher program policies, targeting poor students of color with the same undue influence and spirit of liberal white savior complexes that

[32] These texts hold that about two-thirds of student performance is related to factors outside the school setting.

inspired the "well-meaning" elites during nineteenth and twentieth century U.S. expansionism. When venture philanthropists and corporate stakeholders manage to pass policies that suddenly bestow the masses with "choice," the failure to choose the right school and the failure of children to succeed in "good" schools leave no one else to blame but families themselves. Turning school communities into "rational actors" is thus not only good for business, but also benefits the trivialization and denial of racism. It allows the perpetuation of race-based systems of oppression to operate without explicit reference to race, fostering what Bonilla-Silva calls "racism without race" (2014). In a nation like Puerto Rico, where political and economic elites have successfully silenced meaningful discussions of race and where there is a scarcity of data to speak to the prevalence of structural racism, it becomes ever more urgent to identify and document the ways racism will operate in the era of school choice.

Conclusion

I have sought to delineate the ways in which the public education system in Puerto Rico has been used to advance the interests of political and economic elite classes via the preservation of a white supremacist patriarchal order. This first took place in the U.S. state's attempts to raise a generation of "tropical Yankees" and educators at the service of empire at the turn of the twentieth century. More recently, school closures and a neoliberal education reform in Puerto Rico have been deployed in an attempt to turn school communities into commodities and consumers, which largely benefit a foreign European and U.S. economic elite through the expansion of markets and sociopolitical control over Puerto Rican public schools. At the same

time, this global configuration within the public education sector also affords significant financial and political gains to local, predominantly white Puerto Ricans who act as international intermediaries and managers of local labor and resources. In this scenario, working class Black women like Brenda have no seats in the decision-making table to plan the educational future of Borikén. In this way, this chapter highlighted the necessity of engaging with race and gender as lenses of analysis, which would otherwise render a study severely limited at best, or serving to uphold systems of oppression at worst via their invisibilization.

#TodoPorElMercado:[33]
State Discourse and the Neoliberal Model in Puerto Rico's Education Reform

Introduction

I am sitting at the Luis Muñoz Rivera campamento when Laura, a special education teacher visiting the occupation in solidarity, approaches me with a notebook in hand. Two days prior, we had both attended a meeting at her teacher union's headquarters that hosted a presentation on charter schools. She was eager to share with me what she had experienced earlier that day during her first day of school for teachers, which connected with the presentation we had both attended. Still in disbelief, she read some notes aloud from her notebook, quoting her school principal during a general staff meeting:

- "Cuando venga un padre, quédese callado...trate a ese padre como si el le diera a usted un cheque." (When a parent arrives, stay quiet…treat that parent as if he handed you a check)
- "Vamos a toda…esto es una competencia. Es como las tiendas—que prefiere, ¿JC Penny o Sears?" (We are going full-throttle…this is a competition. It's like the stores—what do you prefer, JC Penny or Sears?)
- "Despierta Borincano que vamos a cambiar todo esto de canal! Usted va estar aqui hasta mayo y con pasión." (Wake up Borincano that we are going to completely change channel! You are going to be here till May and with passion.)
- "Usted se renueva o se tira a morir" (You either reinvent yourself, or you throw yourself to die)

* * *

[33] #TodoPorElMercado or #AllForTheMarket is an allusion to one of the main hashtags, #TodoPorLosNiños (#AllForTheChildren), used to promote the policies ushered under Julia Keleher's administration.

How have neoliberal ideas of public schooling as a competition, the parent as a customer, the school as a business, and the teacher as an expendable service provider made their way into the public discourse surrounding public education in Puerto Rico? This chapter analyzes the racial-class-gendered discourse of education reform by Puerto Rico's Secretary of Education Julia Keleher and Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló, which reveals a reliance on long-standing racialized tropes of Puerto Rican people, Eurodescendants settlers, and ideas of "progress." I first show how the Rosselló-Keleher partnership sought to discredit the public education system and pressure communities into accepting a narrow set of solutions; namely, school closures and privatization models. Next, I demonstrate how Julia Keleher used discursive acts and visual media to present the political debate over privatization as a disagreement between her --a white woman attempting to save Puerto Rican children from a subpar education that traps them in cycles of poverty—, and a group of racialized mean-spirited Puerto Rican activists with a personal vendetta. Later, I present evidence for how the state's framing of education reform trivialized the suffering of public school communities and invisibilized working class women's labor, thus concealing the true costs of school closures and education reform. Lastly, the dominant discourse drew a contrast between a supposed backward and ignorant Puerto Rico, and a technologically advanced future, both of which served to rationalize the repurposing of public education at the service of the global market and the adoption of corporate culture in the pedagogical arena. Altogether, these efforts sought to silence opposition and advance a new logic to think about public education and its operations, a logic that works smoothly with an era of capitalism that

necessitates the surrendering of all areas of life to the globalized market for maximum exploitation.

With this in mind, it is helpful to be aware of Julia Keleher's personal background and qualifications as they prove to be relevant in understanding both her professional practice and what she signifies in the context of Puerto Rico's public education debate. Julia Keleher received her BA in Political Science and MS Ed. with a focus on Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, followed by an MBA from Strayer University. She went on to complete her Ed.D. in Education Leadership at the University of Delaware, and received further professional certifications in "Strategic Decision Making and Risk Management," as well as "Project Management Professional." As a professional, she taught graduate courses at the George Washington in project management, and held a handful of administrative and consulting positions in the field of education. She founded the Keleher and Associates consulting company in 2009, which supported organizations in identifying areas for optimal performance, "mitigating risk," "data driven decision making, and preparation for long-term, system-wide change (Keleher, n.d.). Keleher contextualizes her practice as follows: "In today's economic climate, all levels of an organization are challenged with finding ways to maintain performance levels despite shrinking resources" (n.d.). Keleher was a consultant for the DEPR for about 10 years before she was offered the Secretary of Education position by the Governor in 2007, which upon accepting, made her relocate to Puerto Rico permanently for the first time. Though Keleher has stated that she grew up in a very humble South Philadelphia neighborhood ("un barrio muy humilde") in an Italian

community (Keleher, 2018c), her private education at Cardinal O'Hara High School[34] points to a middle-class background. In summary, Keleher is a product of private schooling, an outsider to the public education system in Puerto Rico, has no K-12 teaching experience, and is an adept manager with a corporate toolset.

With this background, Julia Keleher posits as an ideal leader behind the public relations campaign to gain multi-sector consent in order to implement a dismantling and restructuring of Borikén's public education system. The concept of "consent" comes from Gramsci's idea that political elites must gain the consent of the masses in order to maintain the capitalist status quo and thus avoid the use of coercive force (*Gramsci, Antonio*, 2002). The desire to identify and analyze cultural patterns as a means to "read" societal values, worldviews, and moral codes gave rise to the field of cultural studies. As such, this chapter builds on cultural studies scholarship in that it underscores the prominent role of the cultural realm in a given political economic order (Hall, 2016), and with the intention of serving as a building block towards the development of counter-narratives and alternative political projects. The discursive "selling" of the drastic measures of the Rosselló-Keleher partnership point us to the values and logic of a particular system of governance. Given that the policies behind these speech acts have already proven to be traumatic on the people of Puerto Rico (Orengo-Aguayo et al., 2018; Rosario, 2018) and will likely entail further injustices for working-class students and workers (Feldfeber, Puiggrós, Robertson, & Duhalde, 2018; Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Robert, 2016), an analysis of this language allows us to map and analyze the ideological

[34] For the 2018-2019, annual tuition at Cardinal O'Hara High School started at $10,000 (Cardinal O'Hara High School, 2018).

field that sustains systems of oppression in the guise of "equity" and "justice." Especially in the realm of race, scholars in the last decade have written widely about the way in which groups in power maintain racial systems of oppression by simply adjusting its mechanisms, including speech, so that they are kept alive but hidden from plain view (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Hill, 2008; Hughey & Parks, 2014; Lacy & Ono, 2011). That is, racism has acquired new levels of "sophistication" so that overt racism is no longer politically correct, yet it continues to be implicitly evoked and reproduced. Moreover, this re-formulation of racism –where overtly racist speech or actions are shunned-- has ushered in a belief of a post-racial society, and which consequently regards discussions about race as irrelevant and immediately disqualifies claims of racism.

Experts agree that there is an observable trend of the opening of the public education sector to private interests. This has been facilitated via the elimination of policies that prevent private encroachment and/or the funneling of public funds to private hands, as well as the creation of avenues that allow private entities to weigh in on decisions that affect the general public (Feldfeber et al., 2018; Lipman & Jenkins, 2011; Puiggrós, 1999; Ravitch, 2013; Robert, 2016). What has developed in Borikén in the past two years follows squarely in this pattern of privatization. The shift is no minor occurrence. It must be understood that what we see before us, elsewhere and in the Island, is a serious re-defining of what has been traditionally recognized as a public service and institution (in this case, public education), and a blurring of the clear line of division between the State and the private realm. The role of the state in providing and managing education free of cost has been a key feature of the liberal welfare state model. When the United States finally allowed Puerto Rico to have a certain level of self-

governance, this understanding was inscribed in the Puerto Rican Constitution, written in 1952:

> Every person has the right to an education conducive to a complete development of his/her personality and to the strengthening of respecting the rights of man [sic] and of fundamental freedoms. There will be a system of public schooling, which will be free and entirely non-sectarian. Instruction will be free in the primary and secondary school and, to the extent that the capacity of the State allow, will be compulsory for primary school. Compulsory attendance to public elementary schools, to the extent that the capacity of the State allows, according to what is here presented, is *not to be interpreted to apply to those who receive primary school instruction under non-governmental sponsorship. There will be no utilization of property or public funds for the support of schools or learning institutions that are not of the State*. Nothing of what is here stated will impede that the State could lend any child non-educational services established by law for the protection or wellbeing of children." (emphasis mine.)
>
> (Art. II, Secc. 5, Const. ELA, LPRA, 1956, pg. 3)

When these fundamental parameters were challenged by the 2018 education reform proposal, they did not go unnoticed; Puerto Ricans were watching. As discussed earlier in this study, the education reform bill was met with rejection from various sectors, and the numerous controversies that ensued before and after its announcement (including corruption scandals), made it clear that not only was there widespread disapproval, but that the handing of [limited] public resources to private hands was not exactly a recipe for success.[35] As a result, the state had to engage in extensive, careful, and calculated work in order to appease concerns and garner substantial support from various fronts. It is the discursive aspect of this "work" that the present chapter explores.

A Note on Transcriptions

[35] In the past five years, Puerto Rico's Department of Education leaders have been under public scrutiny and arrested for corruption charges over millions of dollars, all involving granting of contracts to private entities meant to provide goods and services to local public school students (Correa Velázquez, 2018; El Nuevo Día, 2013).

The transcriptions here attempt to capture the original speech audio to the best of my ability. When applicable, original Spanish transcriptions are provided as well as equivalent English translations (in italics). Because speech is transcribed verbatim, it is often the case that quotes from Secretary Julia Keleher will contain grammatical errors or word choice, for Keleher is still developing her Spanish language skills. In fact, Keleher's language competency level was often cited as one of the indicators of her being unfit for the Secretary of Education position.

The following key for transcription conventions is followed:[36]

,	End of intonation unit; continuative contour
.	End of intonation unit; final contour
(.)	Silence/pause, one beat
--	Truncation; cut off word (as in "but someth--")
:	Lengthening of sound
__	Continued, fast speech (as in "but_none_of_them")
(( ))	Description of actions
( )	Indecipherable talk
HERE	Louder relative to surrounding talk
<u>sure</u>ly	Underlined letters denotes increase emphasis
?	Rising question intonation
↑ ↓	Marked fall or rise in intonation immediately following arrow
@	Laughter; one per pulse of laughter

Now I Hear You: Justifying Destruction

One of the thematic patterns observed in the state's messaging and framing of school closures and the education reform proposal was the exploitation of Puerto Rican schools' dire conditions to demand urgent education reform. In essence, the State was willing to acknowledge a myriad of issues in the public education system-- from inadequate funding, to deteriorating facilities, to long-standing unfulfilled vacancies in

[36] This table is based in part on Christy Bird's transcription key from "'Women Can't Tell Jokes': A Gender Ideology in Interaction" (2010).

schools' personnel-- only when it could be used as an excuse to institute a specific set of policies. Policies that were drafted and proposed without school communities' input. Examples of these acknowledgements with tones of indignation and urgency abound. In the official address where he presented the education reform bill, Governor Rosselló referred to the system of public education as "bureaucratic," where there was "no clarity in budgetary administration," where "no money was assigned for classroom materials," and there was "no knowledge of the number of students enrolled" (Rosselló Nevares, 2018). In short, a picture of the Department of Education as a huge, dysfunctional apparatus emerged. The education reform bill similarly speaks of the need to "streamline" processes, "eliminate redundancy," and provide a more "efficient structure" (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2018).

The Secretary of Education often echoed in this sentiment of facing an unnecessary bureaucracy, directly tied to a pattern of schools in disastrous conditions. In a public hearing where state officials posed question to the Secretary about the proposed education reform plan, Keleher was asked what is the the advantage of decentralizing the Department. In her answer, she stated that the system is currently much too bureaucratic, and she shared what she says was a frequent experience in her first 12 months in the Department:

1 yo, por experiencia propia, yo he visto eh::, que, cuando sucede algo, que, un
2 servicio no llega, un papá tiene un problema, un maestro tiene un problema, cae
3 vacantes, de que (.) nnno es possible, encontrar a la persona, que, que es
4 responsible, no_es_posible_de_que _yo_pueda_levantar_el_ teléfono_para_
5 llamar_a, equis persona, que resuelve la situación. ahora mismo, eh: tenemos 35
6 oficinas. administrativas.

1 *i, from my own experience, i have seen uh::, that, when something happens, that,*
2 *a service isn't delivered, a father has an issue, a teacher has an issue, there's*
3 *vacancies, that (.) it'ssss not possible, to find the person, that, that is responsible,*

4 *it's_not_possible_that_i_can_pick_up_the_phone_to_call, x person, who*
5 *resolves the situation. right now, uh: we have 35 offices. administrative.*

Though Keleher at first seemed to struggle to find the right words for her answer, she suddenly gained confidence and spoke quickly (line 4) when she arrived at the root of the department's failure: its massive and confusing organization did not let her perform well. It is certainly concerning to have a head of a government institution stand in a public hearing attesting that she does not know how to navigate her own office because it is too extensive and ill-organized; it is a red flag to be immediately attended. This, she concludes, is why "it is so difficult to identify the cause of why [the Department] cannot obtain the results that [they] want" (Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico, 2018b). Salient in her testimony is an awareness of the quotidian problems that mar public schools, as well as her obvious concern and desire to help families (lines 1-3). However, she feels her hands are tied in the current system. Her first-person account acts as a convenient self-serving evaluation, for while she is doing her best to resolve the Department's pressing issues, it is *the rest* of the Department's workers that stand in the way. That is, she is essential, the brains behind the operations, while the rest take up valuable space and resources.[37] It is clear who is indispensable and who is not.

Keleher also speaks with urgency of the grave conditions at some of the campuses she visited as part of an evaluation process for selecting schools to be closed. Facing significant pushback by public school communities, she explains the logic behind her decisions in a 2017 press conference (El Nuevo Día, 2017):

[37] Keleher's emphasis on needing to downsize and cut costs is contradicted by the DEPR's awarding of $902 million dollars in contracts in only the past two years (López Alicea, 2019b).

1 De que yo tengo, pocos recursos, que no tengo eh:, libros en los salones de clases,
2 tengo niños donde no hay aire, donde hay comejenes donde hay filtración, y la idea
3 es de que yo los dejo ahí?
((Raises eyebrows, cocks head, and pauses))

1 *It's that I have, few resources, that I don't have uh:, books in the classrooms, I*
2 *have children where there's no AC, where there's termites where there's leaks,*
3 *and the idea is that I leave them there?*
((Raises eyebrows, cocks head, and pauses))

As in the previous quote, Keleher exposes some of the common issues that school communities endure due to lack of resources and attention from the DEPR. These speech acts provide an unexpected act of solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico, with government officials like Keleher suddenly providing their own litanies of complaints about the public education system. It is a surprising gesture as it is a reversal of usual government responses to the grievances from teachers, parents, and students, which have often been met with denial, negligence, or inaction (Primera Hora, 2012). In the case of the parents at Escuela Elemental Pedro Soto Rivera in Salinas, for example, the Department went so far as to order injunctions against parents who held a campamento to demand answers as to why their school was closing (Redacción Voces del Sur, 2018). Thus, the state's apparent siding with Puerto Rican school communities is not a "blank check" of solidarity to be used according to local needs and values. Keleher makes this clear in her statement by citing terrible conditions in Puerto Rican schools, and holding school closures as the only solution, which is, ironically, the very thing that communities wanted to prevent. In this way, the inadequate state of schools becomes an arm to be deployed, a fact suddenly made relevant and urgent as a premise for the specific "solutions" being offered. The long-standing suffering of school communities and their neglect is manipulated into a premise for the downsizing of a public institution, the

partnering with private entities, and the closing of some of the most cherished cornerstones of public life in communities: their schools.

White Savior in an Unjust World

A second theme in the discourse of Secretary of Education is the vilification of those who oppose school closures and the education reform, which takes place in tandem with the construction of Keleher as a benevolent, self-sacrificing leader. As stated earlier, rejection to the set of changes that came under Keleher's administration were not isolated cases; educators, activists, parents, and students were some of the most prominent voices in critiquing the measures and the insensitivity, lack of transparency, and undemocratic nature of the process. In turn, Keleher deflected these critiques by casting these groups as bullies and/or as irresponsible self-centered individuals. In a motivational talk given in Puerto Rico at the 2017 Animus Summit, "an innovation summit designed to inspire women to reach their highest level of personal and professional development" (Cobian Media, n.d.), Keleher repeatedly referred to the so-called naysayers and negative forces in her professional life to highlight her focus, determination, and go-getter attitude. Only three minutes into her talk, titled "How Perception Can Make or Break Change," Keleher shares with her majority-women audience her first experiences as Secretary of Education in Puerto Rico (Keleher, 2018):

1 una cosa que nunca esperaba tener, que la critica aquí es bien duro, aquí casi se
2 quiere matar a las personas, y critican por nada. ((audience laughs, claps, and
3 cheers strongly. Keleher smiles and pauses for laughter to subside)) eva ayala
4 quiere que, dice que soy oportuniista, este, hay muchos retos, de que quieren que
5 renuncia, y en otros momentos están buscando, hay un demandamos, entonces un
6 protesta—cosas que nunca jamás en mi vida había pensado de que iba vivir.

1 *one thing that i never expected to have, that criticism here is very harsh, here they*
2 *almost want to kill people, and they criticize for anything. ((audience laughs,*
3 *claps, and cheers strongly. Keleher smiles and pauses for laughter to subside))*

eva ayala wants that, she says that i'm an opportuunist, um, there's many challenges, that they want that i quit, and in other moments they're looking— there's a suing me, then a protest— things that never in my life i had imagined that i would experience.

Here, as elsewhere in her speech and in other speaking opportunities, Keleher turns a national political struggle into an interpersonal feud where she is unjustly judged and attacked, going so far as to singling out a leader of a Puerto Rican teacher union (EDUCAMOS president, Eva Ayala). Because her entire talk is focused on "reaching your full potential" by never allowing negative thoughts or others' criticism to "distract you" from your goals, Keleher portrays legitimate concerns over the future of public education in Puerto Rico as ill-intentioned trivial critiques. The fact that the conference centered on women's empowerment and that Keleher builds rapport with the audience based on a sense of sisterhood and shared experiences, allows for Keleher to use her critics as an archetype of the "haters" and catty women who criticize and put others down for no good reason. That is, according to Keleher, the criticism she receives is akin to criticizing someone's new hobby or decision to change careers, rather than being part of a larger frame of institutional and national dimension. In short, Keleher discursively builds herself a platform based on mainstream white feminist principles that refuse a historical, intersectional lens that would reveal the legitimacy of her critics and her oppressive role. Not only does Keleher makes use of the personal narrative and emotional experience to turn a political struggle into a matter of individuals being bullies or catty women, but goes so far as to regard them as xenophobes or "reverse racists."[38] Many Puerto Ricans

[38] The idea of "reverse racism" is akin to claims of "reverse discrimination," and is frequently the go-to line of argument for opponents of affirmative action measures. "Reverse discrimination" is defined as "discrimination against members of a dominant or majority group (typically men and whites) especially

disagreed with Governor Rosselló's naming of Keleher as Secretary of Education, who did not grow up in Puerto Rico, had no teaching experience in the public education system, and whose appointment disregarded the many locals who had in-depth experience and knowledge of Puerto Rico's Department of Education. In an interview, Keleher suggests that people's rejection is due to interpersonal discrimination; that is, she casts herself as a victim of "reverse racism." In an interview with Metro Puerto Rico regarding several of the controversies that have transpired during her administration, she shares (Keleher, 2018):

hay otro grupo que noo—que no les caigo bien, por no ser puertorriqueña. que no sé si eso puede ser algún tipo de descrimen. no sé si esta bien, si un boricua llega allí a los estados unidos y le dicen (.) (.) ((points ahead with fingers, furrows brow)) tú tú no eres de aquí. tú no puedes tener ese puesto. porque es casi lo mismo. de que me dicen a mí, una americana, "tu no puedes venir aquí para tener ese puesto." como sería para tu—si usted tiene: un hijo, una hija, y:: suena con ser, no se qué, el presidente, no se qué, o_la_secretaria_de_educación, y está limitado por ser boricua (.)(.) no creo que es lo que deberíamos estar enseñando a los jóvenes. de que se limitan por como se definen por lo que es su raíz.

there's another group that don't—that they don't like me, because i'm not puerto rican, i don't know if that could be, some sort of discrimination, i don't know if someone, if a boricua arrives there in the united states and they tell him (.)(.) ((points ahead with fingers, furrows brow)) you, you're not from here, you can't hold that position. because it's almost the same thing, that they tell me, an american, you can't come here and have this position. how would it be if your—if you have a son, or a daughter, and:: who dreams of being, i don't what, president, i don't know what, or the secretary of education, and is limited for being boricua (.)(.) i don't think that's what we should be, teaching, to the youth, that they limit, by how they're defined, by what is his root.

In this excerpt, Keleher creates a narrative of personal attack where her opponents are xenophobes or "racists" who base their critiques on prejudice and irrelevant criteria. More importantly, Keleher chooses a painful recorded historical pattern of racism in the

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when resulting from policies established to correct past discrimination against members of a traditionally socio-politically non-dominant minority group or disadvantaged group" (Watts, 2010).

Boricua collective memory to draw sympathy towards herself. It is interesting that in this part of the interview, Keleher turns to her interlocutor to directly pose the question of how she would feel if her child was a victim of racism in the U.S., which is actually a likely scenario for many Puerto Ricans who decide to leave the Island. The real, documented racism and discrimination that Puerto Ricans have experienced at the hands of U.S. colonizers in their own land and in continental U.S. (Alamo-Pastrana, 2016; del Moral, 2013a; Negrón de Montilla, 1977; R. Z. Rivera, 2003; Stratton, 2016) is thus turned on its head and deployed against historically oppressed peoples, so that working class, women-majority activists become the perpetrators of one of society's main social ills. This reverse racism is a symptom of what scholar Bonilla-Silva (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) calls the "enigma of 'racism without racists," or "colorblind racism." Colorblind racism is blind to historically rooted processes and structural forces that have maintained racial inequalities, making room for victim-blaming and whites' ability to "express resentment toward minorities…and even claim to be the victims of 'reverse racism'" (p. 4).

In the face of such alleged evil forces, Keleher casts herself by default as the white woman victim who, despite hardships, accepts the task of leading for the greater good. This persona is constructed through both a visual and a verbal discourse. Keleher and the DEPR make extensive use of their social media platforms to convey an image of the Secretary as a caring, kind figure amidst groups of less fortunate dark-skinned children. The images we see in Figure 2.1 and 2.2 are not exceptions but rather quintessential of a pattern of protagonism, much like the voluntourism[39] photos in social

[39] Voluntourism has become a popular trend in the past few decades, which is defined as "the combination of 'travel with voluntary work, attracting individuals that are seeking a tourist experience that is mutually beneficial, that will contribute not only to their personal development but also positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate'" (Lee Freidus, 2017).

media profiles and feel-good, depoliticized stories on the internet. This same type of imagery is used in ten out of the eleven short videos that make up the DEPR's banner on Facebook: Keleher crouching next to Boricua children, Keleher smiling and helping them with task in the classroom, Keleher posing with them for photos, and so on. While Keleher's early tweets as Secretary of Education included simple texts, news sharing, and inspirational quotes from the likes of Mother Theresa and Walt Disney, they took a much more professionalized, public relations turn during late Spring of 2017 (as seen in Figure 2.2). Thus this pattern cannot be taken as a chance reflection of reality (i.e. Keleher loves to interact with students and they are dark-skinned by chance), for the level of curation and intention is undeniable and is telling of a social media professional fulfilling a specific job duty; in short, it is a de facto media campaign. Similarly, these choices and racial undertones cannot be dismissed as innocent or inconsequential, for they have real and harmful consequences. Bandyopadhyay and Patil argue that these symbolic patterns "reinforce notions of 'Third World' dependency, powerlessness, and need, while perpetuating 'First World' beneficence, and capacity to act, assist, and save" (2017, p. 651).

Figure 2.1. A May, 2017 tweet from Secretary of Education Julia Keleher's official Twitter account.

Figure 2.2. A September, 2018 tweet from Secretary of Education Julia Keleher's official Twitter account.

This curation of a white savior with the best intentions, and who works with resolve and resignation to improve the lives of Puerto Rican children, is also found in her spoken messages. After dedicating a considerable amount of time of a motivational speech to all the negative ideas and entities that surround her, Keleher underscores her willingness to withstand it all in the name of a higher purpose:

1 y pase lo que pase, esto no estoy haciendo eso por mi. estoy haciendo eso por el
2 futuro de puerto rico, por niños y niñas que yo no conozco, ((audience claps))
3 familias que están allí, así que cualquier cosa que ellos puedan decir NO
4 IMPORTA ((motions hand as if throwing out something)) porque, estoy enfocada
5 en algo mucho mas importante de quien soy yo.

1 and no matter what happens, that is not done for myself. i am doing it for the
2 future of puerto rico, for the boys and girls who i have not met ((audience claps))
3 families that are there. so whatever it is that they can say DOES NOT MATTER
4 ((motions hand as if throwing out something)) because, i am focused in something
5 much more important than who i am.

She thus portrays herself as a self-sacrificing, caring heroine, who works in the name of the children of Puerto Rico, independent of the prestige, power, or the $250,000 salary she receives as Secretary of Education. In fact, she cites her salary as proof that her taking on the position of Secretary is actually a sacrifice on her end and a decision to give more than what she gets: according to Keleher, such a difficult position and a comparable size school district would offer her better compensation in continental U.S. (Keleher, 2017a). Instead, she chose to leave everything behind that she had worked so hard to build (“dejar atrás toda una vida construida con muchos sacrificios”), and move to Puerto Rico with nothing but a suitcase (“llegué con una maleta”) (2017a). In her professed generosity and higher purpose, Keleher legitimizes her choosing to ignore (line 3) dissenting voices to her policies.

Her suffering, which she alludes to in the quote above, is made much more explicit in other speaking opportunities. In another interview published in the online platform of newspaper El Nuevo Día titled "Julia Keleher llora al hablar sobre su misión y la resistencia de los boricuas" ("Julia Keleher cries while speaking about her mission and the resistance of boricuas"), the Secretary speaks with teary eyes about her struggle to carry on her agenda in the face of overwhelming challenges and hostility (Keleher, 2018b). In another interview following the passage of the education reform law, Keleher celebrates this and other "logros" (accomplishments) and shares that "cuando uno se pone a pensar, pues valió la pena todo el dolor que uno tiene que sufrir aquí" (when one stops to reflect, then all the pain that one has to endure here was worth it) (Rivera Clemente, 2018c). She constantly refers to her good intentions, the pressure and distress she experiences due to the great burden she carries as a leader trying to "transform" a public education in shambles, and as a victim of naysayers and mean-spirited opposition. Once again, this simplified narrative of good versus evil (where a white, wealthy political figure is a hero, and workers and everyday Puerto Ricans are villains) reduced to interpersonal tension ("they just don't like me") serves to silence and trivialize a significant institutional political struggle with important historical foundations and consequences. Keleher's equation relies on the belief of a post-racial society, where people of all racial backgrounds are now equal and the legacy of colonization (perhaps nowhere more salient that in a place like Puerto Rico, still under the stronghold of the U.S.) is no longer a relevant factor.

You're Faking It: Who Is Afforded Feeling

While Keleher regularly delivered pathologized and dismissed community opinions that put her suffering and hardship on the limelight, communities faced the dispossession of an important public space, families were in the dark about how they would get children to school, children grieved their schools' closing and displacement, and educators faced unprecedented stress over their employment. The state discourse worked to either silence or minimize everyday people's suffering, or to speak of it as part of a necessary collective sacrifice for a better tomorrow. The nature of state and legal discourse which, based on Western paradigms, privileges reason over emotion, "the facts" over so-called subjective experience, and "expert" or official voices over ordinary citizens, facilitates the "sweeping under the rug" of the violence people endure. The Governor's official address presenting his education reform bill and the ratified bill both illustrate this pattern, which talk extensively about the "inefficiency" of the DEPR and its mismanagement of funds, which Keleher often echoed. These speech events, however, failed to speak of the emotional and psychological damage that children, families, and school personnel had endured due to past state negligence but also due to the "solutions" that were now being implemented under Rosselló's and Keleher's leadership. Although countless headlines spoke of high levels of stress and anxiety that school communities were experiencing, especially teachers, parents, and children affected by school closings (Agencia EFE, 2018c; Gurney, 2018; Leopez Alicea, 2018), public officials did not acknowledge this. Such a grave omission can be equated to a type of silence. Puerto Rican scholar Ileana M. Rodríguez-Silva holds that "silence, like speaking, is an action and an exercise of power," and thus to study silence is to "unearth power struggles" (2012, p. 11). While activists and parents on the ground were adamant about voicing their

present hardships and the ones they foresaw with the education reform and massive school closures, their stories and concerns were not featured in any official's speech, let alone captured in a piece of legislation. State silence and the power to exclude certain voices from official accounts became part of crafting a narrative of popular consent, creating the illusion that the people of Puerto Rico were open to school privatization models and dispossession via school closures.

Whenever people's pain is referenced, however, it is severely understated and it is regarded as part of the contributions that everyone must make for a brighter future. A common pattern of this limited acknowledgement of pain is the use of generalized terms, and euphemistic adjectives such as "difficult" and "challenging" to describe school communities' experiences. In a roughly 25-minute video from a press conference where she presents a summary of the first wave of school closures to take place in 2017, Keleher's only allusion to people's painful grappling with the prospect of their schools being closed is a brief "I understand also that there was a lot of anxiety, about, about this process," and she immediately ends this thought to jump into a different speaking point (El Nuevo Día, 2017). In an interview, Keleher argues that people resent her leadership because, understandably, they simply feel overwhelmed by all the "changes" she is bringing to the DEPR; "it's too much" and people "can't understand it" (Keleher, 2018). These discursive strategies make affected individuals' experiences banal and their suffering abstract, and thus less likely to provoke strong reactions from the audience regarding this particular political issue. In reality, the halls of the DEPR's regional offices were filled with DEPR employees in the verge of tears over unjust relocations or pending procedures; teacher unions received endless messages with complaints and grievances

about workers' rights violations; children cried over their school's closure; parents and school staff spent their summer sitting in campamentos enduring the heat and forgoing their vacations. Instead of being regarded as painful injustices, the substantial effects that school closures, consolidations, and restructuring of the DEPR have had on families and school personnel were treated part of the inevitable, natural parts of life. This is a teaching moment to model appropriate behavior for our children, Keleher argues: "change is part of life and adapting to them is key to having success" (Keleher, 2017f). "People want change but when the moment arrives it is quite difficult," Keleher tells her audience of aspiring female change-makers after venting about what a difficult time people have given her during her tenure (Keleher, 2018). In context, her statement was not one of empathy but of exasperation with people who were opposed to her approach. People were making things more difficult than they really were, it was a matter of shifting perspective, the message went.

These instances fall into a larger pattern of white people's lack of empathy for the suffering of people of color, which has been well-documented by scholarship in various fields: from the anti-Black dehumanizing ideologies that undergird the violence of chattel slavery,[40] to the medical malpractice Black and brown bodies experience to this day.[41] Feagin and Vera coined the term "social alexythimia" (derived from the psychiatric concept of alexythimia occurring in individuals) to refer to oppressors' "reduced ability

[40] See, for example, Samuel A. Cartwright's "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race" (1851). In it, Cartwright presents the "physiological differences" between whites and blacks and expands on dysæsthesia, a common "disease" common among Black people who desire or have access to freedom. Symptoms are described as including "insensibility of the skin," "insensibility of the nerves," and "total loss of feeling" (709-710).

[41] Beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites, which date back to the colonial era, are associated with the perception that Black people feel less pain than whites. This has resulted in Black patients receiving inadequate treatment in the medical setting, including lack of pain relief (Hoffman, Trawalter, Axt, & Oliver, 2016; Wylie & McConkey, 2019).

to understand or relate to the emotions, such as recurring pain, of those targeted by oppression," which is "essential to the creation and maintenance of a racist society" (Feagin, 2014). The extent to which subjects may be self-aware and embracing of this "disorder" is irrelevant for our object of study; what stands are the real consequences that this perception and its dissemination have on the material conditions and wellbeing of marginalized groups. The trauma and negative effects endured by teachers, parents, and children were not fully recognized, let alone attended, and as such, the grand project of the Puerto Rican political elite was better able to run smoothly.

We're in This Together!

To buffer any discord that may come with the disconcerting, often violent, process, the state discourse pushed a message of a unifying, patriotic call to action, which sometimes entailed a certain degree of self-sacrifice. This approach was especially salient in the public relations communications of the DEPR, mainly via the Secretary's official twitter account (@SecEducacionPR). From mid-2017 to today, the hashtags #TodoPorLosNiños (#AllForTheChildren), #YoSoyDE[42] (#IAmDE), #Comprometidos (#Committed), and #HoyConstruimos (#TodayWeBuild) became an essential addendum to most of the tweets posted by @SecEducacionPR, which were regularly shared by the Governor's official twitter account (@RicardoRossello). "Debemos ser una sola Isla" (we must all be one Island), Keleher writes in an op-ed (Keleher, 2017f). Together, these key phrases underscore a sense of Puerto Rican collectivity and ownership over the state of public education: "we" are part of the Department, "our" contribution is key, "we" are

[42] "DE" stands for the Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico. I use DEPR through out this paper so as not to confuse it with the U.S. federal Department of Education (DE), which uses the same initials.

responsible for the course this project takes. While a spirit of ownership and action is arguably a positive driver of democracy, its timing and genuineness is questionable. Part of the outrage that many stakeholders felt stemmed from the fact that they were shut out of decision-making and conversations; that is, the decision to cut public education spending, to close down hundreds of schools and the criterion used, and the drafting of the education reform bill were all done behind closed doors and by a select group of people. It is only after decisions were made and work plans were laid out that the public were being invited to partake in teamwork. More importantly, this nationwide call to a massive group effort is said to be in the name of Puerto Rican children; everyone must "bite the bullet" because it is #TodoPorLosNiños (#AllForTheChildren). The message is: *Yes, it is tough, you may have to spend more time driving to a new school, you may be assigned to teach Spanish even though you are a Music teacher, you may find yourself working with 30 instead of 20 students in a class, but it is a sacrifice we all have to make for a better Puerto Rico*. Everyone must be #Committed.

By extension, those who complain or oppose are not committed; they are looking out for their own interests rather than Puerto Rican children. This was made clear when teachers and community advocates raised their voices and were casted as selfish or having ulterior motives. When a group of parents and educators in a school in Loiza, alarmed over the threat of their school closing, decided to strike until the DE met with them (Meléndez García, 2017a), Keleher decided to publicly shame them on her social media. "Unjust that adults in Loíza deny *el pan de la enseñanza*[43] to children for three

[43] Literally translates as "the bread of learning," this phrase is often used in Puerto Rico to refer to education, especially public education.

consecutive days" (Keleher, 2017c). Similarly, days before May 1st 2017, when some teacher unions had called for a general strike to protest multiple threats to public education and their rights as workers[44], Keleher responded by vilifying teachers. "Saddened to see that more than 360,000 students will be obligated to lose a day of learning" (Keleher, 2017b). "Trying to underscore how adult actions impact students #kidsfirst," she follows in an additional tweet (Keleher, 2017b). Keleher's discourse not only grossly overlooks the fact that school communities' actions are ultimately centered on what they feel is best for children, but it also dismisses the fact that school personnel's wellbeing and job satisfaction is strongly tied to retaining talent at schools and consequently, student learning (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Cameron & Lovett, 2015). At the same time, while Keleher's speech acts emphasize an image of having open lines of communication and being receptive to feedback from stakeholders, her shunning of activists' nonviolent tactics demonstrate that she tolerates and is receptive to specific ways of voicing grievances. Lastly, the nationalistic appeal ("do it for Puerto Rico") is contradictory given that neoliberalism involves states that gradually absolve themselves from providing certain services and guarantees to the people, yet we see here how the Puerto Rican government nevertheless asks its citizens to rise to the occasion and take full ownership of the future of the Island.

#¿QuiénEsDE? (#WhoIsDE?)

But this sudden call for all Boricuas to roll up their sleeves and simply swallow a tough pill in the name of their children is a misleading picture of who is really being

[44] Teachers striked in rejection to the announced closings/consolidation of nearly 200 schools, the threat of dismantling the teachers' retirement system, improved working conditions, and the fiscal board's cuts to social spending and attempts to force the people of Puerto Rico to pay an unaudited debt (Primera Hora, 2017a).

asked to step up to the plate: Puerto Rican working-class women. As seen in the hashtags above, the emphasis on an abstract "I" (or "yo", in "#YoSoyDE"), conjugations in the first-person plural (i.e. "#WeBuild," "#WeAreCommitted"), and the general invitations for all Puerto Ricans to make this "transformation" in education possible, creates the illusion of a plural, collective effort and gender-neutral call for action. In fact, where gender-neutral terms are not present, the Spanish traditional default of using a male pronoun as the neutral is used (e.g. the gender-neutral "the student" in Spanish would take the male default "el estudiante" and not "la estudiante"). As such, when referring to all teachers or an abstract teacher, "los maestros" or "el maestro" is used; for parent or parents, "el padre" or "los padres" is used, respectively. Consequently, the discourse around who is affected by changes in public education policies, who needs to be "held accountable" like never before, who needs to make sacrifices, and who needs to be "realistic" in their expectations given the limited resources at hand, is "everyone" in school communities, or a large part of the male population, if taken literally.

Although 4 out of 5 public school teachers in grades K-12th grade and 9 out of 10 teachers at the pre-school level are women (Disdier Flores, 2016), neither the Governor nor the Secretary of Education have ever brought up this fact, nor have they ever referred to teachers by the collective female pronoun "maestras." Similarly, although demographic information on school staff and other contracted support staff (e.g. therapists) is not reported by the DE, there is evidence that this group of workers are also largely women. In an interview, Puerto Rican lawyer, former senator, and functional diversity rights advocate Maria de Lourdes de Santiago, confirmed that this women-majority pattern in K-12 education in its entirety (from mothers, caregivers, to school

teachers and staff) is especially true in the case of children enrolled in the Special Education Program. According to de Santiago, about 80% of workers serving children with functional diversity, from teacher assistants assistants, to psychiatrists, to occupational therapists and speech therapists, are overwhelmingly women (Santiago, 2018). A recent report on social workers across the nation reflects this dynamic, which shows that 4 out of 5 social workers are women, and in 2015, 86% of MSW graduates were female (Salsberg et al., 2017). Unfortunately, despite dominating the field, female social workers were still paid 10% less than their male counterparts (2017), and research shows that teachers in general make about 19% less than professionals with similar skills and educational attainment (National Education Association, 2018).

In addition, research has also shown that women overall tend to experience increased "reproductive labour as well as their responsibility for income generation" as a result of neoliberal policies, which tend to slash through social spending and place them in even more precarious conditions (Wilson, 2015). This labor includes mothers, who generally bear "the burden of securing needed services for their children in current K-12 educational systems" (Jabbar et al., 2018). In the face of school closures, abrupt relocations, overcrowding, and unprepared school sites,[45] it was also female caregivers who had to provide extra time and labor to take children to schools further away from their home, and who performed the affective labor necessary to ease children's transition into new schools or situations, a process especially difficult for students with disabilities who thrive on routine and familiar environments. In the context of Puerto Rico this is

[45] A common complaint in the wake of school consolidations was that host schools were in poor condition and unprepared to receive the number and type of students they received: parents found inadequate facilities, overcrowding, and multiple teacher/staff vacancies (Inter News Services, 2018c; Rivera Clemente, 2018b).

especially important as about 1 of every 3 children in public schools are under the Special Education Program (Disdier & Jara, 2017), nearly 6 out of every 10 boricua children live in a single-parent household (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017), and 70% of Puerto Rican families living below the poverty level are women-headed households with children (according to a US Census estimate [U.S. Census Bureau, 2016]). In short, it is not only women, but poor women of color who are disproportionately hurt by neoliberal policies. As such, patriarchal language conventions and gender-neutral terminology (when used inappropriately) invisibilize the prominent role that femme members of the society play in the education sector and reproductive labor, while also perpetuating a false sense of equality in the way that neoliberal policies, including austerity measures, affect society. To claim that the neoliberal hydra benefits all and requires the same "sacrifice" of all equally, as the official state discourse suggests, is a convenient but false image. Silence, once again, is not accidental nor innocent. Rather, it is a discursive invisibilization of women's power and work; a continuation of failing to recognize women's paid, underpaid, and unpaid labor, yet unjustly relying on it to fuel a capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist system.

Keeping Up with the Globalized Markets

Given that the recent education policies in Puerto Rico have already had serious repercussions and more appear to be on the horizon, how is it that they are made appealing and seemingly rational? In essence, public education was framed as an arena for a battle between a failed, backward, obsolete Puerto Rico, versus a globalized, technologically-based future where only the strong will survive. An analysis of the education reform legislation and state discourse reveals that a sense of fear and

uncertainty over the future was exploited to present market-based measures as the only solution to the economic crisis that ailed the Island.

The state discourse features numerous mentions of a nation in shambles amidst a rapidly changing landscape. In his education reform speech Rosselló paints a picture of a world that is "every day more competitive and more complex," and an "unresponsive" public education system in the Island (Rosselló Nevares, 2018). Similarly, the education reform law mentions "a changing world….in constant evolution," with a "global dynamic economy" in which Puerto Rico is certainly not competitive, let alone a leader (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2018). Keleher echoes this message, often comparing Puerto Rico with the conditions and performance of other countries, and especially the United States. Puerto Rican students do not have "access to technology and tools of the twenty-first century," she argues, nor do they currently have "a real and legitimate opportunity to compete" (Keleher, 2017f). She often places the United States as a standard and point of reference, a common tendency in Puerto Rico given the Island's political status. Children in Puerto Rico today, Keleher holds, do not "have the same opportunities as the children I have witnessed in the United States" (Keleher, 2018a). "My goal is to ensure that public schools in PR are so good and effective that they are recognized in the U.S. and the rest of the world" she shares in her twitter (Keleher, 2017d). On the same day, she tweets an article of the "2019 Best Public Schools in America" with the caption, "Because [sic] we don't have ANY school in this listing?"[46] (Keleher, 2017e). The context in which these statements were being made is key. When the school reform law was proposed in

[46] Because Keleher has improved her Spanish language skills via her work in Puerto Rico in the past few years, she sometimes makes mistakes in her written and spoken expressions; in this case, writing "because" in Spanish rather than "why."

February 2018, everyday people of Borikén had already endured years of economic downturn, a hurricane with an appalling government relief response, multiple cuts to social spending, and now lived under the yoke of a dictatorial fiscal oversight board whose sole purpose was to ensure Puerto Ricans paid over $70 billion of government debt. In this way, the manipulation of a situation of crisis was not a difficult maneuver for the drivers of privatization: they could point at the conditions all over the island as evidence of the nation's precarious condition and its threatened future in the global race.

These images of a "failed Puerto Rico" on the one hand, and a possible promising future ushered in by Western models and white leadership on the other, can be traced back to racialized, colonial archetypes. As seen in the previous chapter, the establishment of the DE itself was a product and strategy of the U.S. imperialist project, which claimed to bring "progress" and "freedom" to a so-called backwards people (del Moral, 2013a; Negrón de Montilla, 1977). We see this pattern resurface subtly under the tenure of Secretary of Education Keleher, in which a narrative of local Puerto Rican deficiencies and ignorance is held against imported, Anglo-American-led solutions.

It could be argued that the very naming of Julia Keleher as Secretary of Education, bypassing a multitude of skilled and experienced Puerto Rican educators, had racial elements. Justifying the hiring of Keleher, Governor Rosselló argued that, "[the Department of Education] had not had anyone like her until now," who could both "innovate and modernize the agency" (EFE News Service, 2017). In fact, Rosselló declares positive transformation in education and local Puerto Rican talent as antithetical to each other. "'I needed somebody to be transformative, but at the same time to know and understand the Department of Education here in Puerto Rico.' Those qualities

'essentially were mutually exclusive,'" he is quoted in a Penn Gazette spread (Hughes, 2018). In short, Keleher was an ideal candidate because she was *not* Puerto Rican. Such statements imply a lack of local talent and the inability of Boricuas to envision and produce new models. Keleher reiterates rather than challenges this idea when addressing her audience at the annual legislative conference in Washington, D.C., put on by the Council of Chief State School Officers organization. In her 2018 update of Puerto Rico's schools in the aftermath of hurricane Maria (*Julia Keleher addressing CCSSO*, 2018), Keleher expressed deep gratitude towards partners and organizations in the mainland that supported them during relief efforts given that –according to Keleher-- the Island and its people are not self-sufficient:

1 we were--we were grateful to have support from uh the council of great city
2 schools they sent a team from 7 facilities and maintenance folks to help us, Uh:
3 the infrastructure isn't there—and and the human talent, like, the capital, to know-
4 how to solve these problems also isn't there, so we're very grateful to have
5 facilities folk down there to help us get a handle on that, uh we have about 35
6 million dollars in damages, you know puerto rico had a fiscal crisis to begin with
7 so- we're not sort of – uh liquid ((smiles)) @@ so that 35 million dollars we're
8 really dependent on the federal government to be able to provide it

We can see in the excerpt above how Keleher places significant stress on need and dependency. While it may be that the Secretary refers to the physical destruction that the hurricane left in the Island when stating that "the infrastructure isn't there," to say that there is no "human talent" and no knowledge ("know how") in a population of 3.5 million people cannot be attributed to a natural disaster. If we are to use common metrics of education and skills, it is relevant to mention that 24.9% of Puerto Rico's adult population have a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), which is comparable to several U.S. state rates. Moreover, this statement grossly overlooks the fact that local

communities, especially teachers and parents, were instrumental in restoring several schools in the aftermath of Maria, unpaid and largely without government support. In fact, school reparations were part of a larger pattern of self-reliance, resourcefulness, cooperativism, and solidarity in the aftermath of Maria, with community members organizing soup kitchens, construction projects, and delivering aid to the most vulnerable, effectively filling the holes of government neglect (Bezares Lamboy, 2018; Meléndez García, 2017b; ORP-AMPR, 2017). Rather than mentioning these instances, however, Keleher commends "her team," and notes that she "learned" that Puerto Ricans are "tre-men-dous-ly resilient…kind, good people who ALL helped each other" (*Julia Keleher addressing CCSSO*, 2018). Together, her message and word choice are especially significant given that Keleher is among colleagues who share a similar racial background and socioeconomic status, as 79% of chief state school officers are white, hold significant political power, and average triple-digit salaries.[47] Her speech and setting are reminiscent of other white members of the political elite throughout history who, in speaking with their peers, remind each other of their virtues and potential to affect the world, as well as the poverty and helplessness of people of color (see Ch. 1). Over a century after U.S. occupation of the Island and the institution of a Department of Education, not much had changed in the racist perspectives held by its leadership: whereas mainland U.S. could offer talent, skills, and funds, Puerto Ricans were simply a benevolent, strong, but needy people.

[47] As of January 2019, 79% of the 57 chief state school officers in U.S. states and territories are white, and 56% are male (CCSSO, n.d.).

In addition to this image of dependency, the state also pushed a suggestive message of Puerto Ricans as ignorant, backward, out-of-touch with the current reality, and thus relegated to the past; an embodiment of the ill status of the current DE and its need to be transformed. This notion is perhaps most overtly demonstrated in instances where Keleher quotes or impersonates common people of Puerto Rico. Consider the press conference transcript below from May 2017, in which the Secretary explains the response from communities when she tried having town halls focused on the first set of massive school closures in her tenure (El Nuevo Día, 2017):

((exhales, half chuckles, and nods head))
en muchos casos, lo que presentaron fue:: ↓mi_escuela_es_bonita_que_tenemos_ alianza[13]_que_ los_papas_lo_van_a_hacer—que_se_van_a_encargar_de _la_planta_física_que_no_me_la_ cierren_que_la_vamos_a_pintar_que_no_se_ preocupe_que_nos_dejen_abierta. ((opens arms)) (.) (.) ↑con pocos recursos, con los problemas que tienen con la planta física, la petición fue:: ((puts arms forward and makes flicking motion with her palms)) dejeme abierta. ((widens eyes)) Y LA GENTE, ((motions a large sphere with hands)) EN UNA AUDIENCIA PÚBLICA,↓me dijo ((eyes glaring, swings head with attitude))↑Pues claro. te voy a hablar, de lo lindo de mi escuela, para que no me la cierres. ((swings head defiantly))

((exhales, half chuckles, and nods head))
in many cases, what was presented was::, ↓"my_school_is_pretty_that_we_have_ alianza[48]*_that_the_ parents_will_do_it—that_they'll_be_in_charge_of_the _physical_structure_that_don't_close_it_on_me_that_we_are_going_to_paint_it _that_don't_worry_that_leave_it_open_for_us. ((opens arms)) (.) (.)↑with few resources, with the problems that they have with the physical structure, the request was:: ((puts arms forward and makes flicking motion with her palms)) leave it open. ((widens eyes)) AND THE PEOPLE, ((motions a large sphere with hands)) IN A PUBLIC FORUM, ↓told me ((eyes glaring, swings head with attitude)) ↑well of course. i'm going to talk to you, about how wonderful my school is, so you don't close it on me. ((swings head defiantly))*

[48] "Alianza" is a school partnership with an outside entity, usually a nonprofit or educational institution, that provides supplementary programming for children and youth at public schools. These usually target or give preference to schools serving marginalized student populations. One of the *alianzas* at one of the schools I visited during my fieldwork, for example, consisted of University of Puerto Rico students teaching children about environmental issues in their community.

There is an obvious verbal and visual process of othering in Keleher's "performance" that reveal racialized notions of Boricuas. Her need to adopt a different persona whenever she quotes parents and members of the community inadvertently communicate a distancing between her and this group of people (i.e. they are different from her). This impersonation also conveys a power differential, for a person would not try to imitate someone publicly if she considers the subject her equal or superior (unless there is an established, friendly relationship). First, we are presented with a humble character via a demure "Puerto Rican accent" that features a low pitch and fast pace, alongside simple, everyday speech (e.g. "my school is pretty," "don't close it on me"). For this verbal characterization there is also a matching body language in which Keleher keeps her arms close to her body, makes repeated up-and-down movements with her upper torso, and maintains her head slightly lowered so that her eyes look up as she speaks. The commonness of Boricuas here presented is not proud, it is meek: Keleher makes herself small (she stops using her arms to express herself and often lowers her upper body), and it is subordinate (she lowers her head slightly and looks up as if she could not look directly to her interlocutor's eyes). Together, this short performative interpretation brings back centuries-old images of the colonial "noble savage," which later became the docile imperial subject, with colonial women bearing a double expectation of submissiveness (under a patriarchal and white supremacist society). As chapter 1 shows, at the dawn of U.S. occupation in Borikén, Puerto Ricans were often characterized as good-natured and docile, but utterly uncivilized and helpless.

Interestingly, there is a second Boricua type that Keleher performs, which is in significant contrast to the first. For this character, the pace of her speech slows down with short pauses, thus making each phrase more pronounced and evoking boldness (lines 9-10). Despite the short impersonation, the sassy head movements and glaring eyes, looking straight ahead, suggest defiance, which is in sharp contrast to the previous lowered head with eyes looking up. This Boricua "type" is angry, possibly disrespectful, and surely not someone pleasant to be around. The portrayal is reminiscent of another popular stereotype used to control women of color, especially Black women. The Sapphire[49] archetype casts Black women as "sassy, overly assertive" and with an "argumentative nature" (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2016). This image is controlling because it is an attempt to silence Puerto Rican women (as the speaker's expression is being tacitly condemned rather than celebrated), and cast their discontent as unfounded. What is significant about both character "types" performed by Keleher is that despite their apparent differences, both are framed as dismissible and uninspiring—they are not individuals with whom you are supposed to want to identify. It is implied that both, making polite pleas to keep your schools open (in the first example) and using rhetoric to achieve your political goal (in the second example) are ludicrous in their own way. Keleher puts emphasis on the context by pointing that this event took place "IN A PUBLIC FORUM," insinuating that people's comments were tactless, ridiculous acts.

Because throughout the press conference Keleher reiterates how much she tried to listen to communities and let them have a sense of ownership over the future of their

[49] According to Jerald et. al., "the Sapphire stereotype was popularized through the character of Sapphire Stevens, the overbearing wife of Kingfish on the radio and television sitcom "Amos 'n Andy" during the 1940s and 1950s" (2016).

education, there is an implied blame casted on the Puerto Ricans for not coming forward with proper arguments and by not abiding by the state-prescribed paradigms (e.g. there is no debating whether schools need to be systematically closed, it's about which ones and how). This is made explicit soon after when she states, "but if I listen to you, you have to tell me, according to the the, the parameters that I have," and when she says she hopes future "proposals are of a different quality" (El Nuevo Día, 2017). In this way, the public forum attendees are made as unsophisticated and ignorant people who make unrealistic demands, based on ideals and attitudes rather than "facts," and thus should not be given serious consideration. Taken in their entirety, we see how Keleher borrows from an old, existing repertoire of racialized, gendered, colonized subject archetypes to associate dissident voices with an undesirable Puerto Rican figure and ultimately demonstrate Boricuas' inadequacy at making decisions about their educational system.

To remedy the current situation of a "failed Puerto Rico" and appear as the better option over that of its opponents, the state utilizes market-friendly elements in education discourse to communicate fiscal soundness and technological advancement. This was conveyed, in part, with Keleher's constant references to data and facts that were meant to underscore the validity of her claims, versus those of the opposition, and evidence her expertise versus the inadequacy of the system prior to her arrival. In the press conference in which she rolled out her first massive plan for school closures, for instance, she repeatedly signals to graphics on a projected screen to justify and legitimize her choice to close 179 schools in May 2017. As she displays a chart on school communities' responses to the prospect of closures, she emphasizes:

> esa gráfica, para mi, demuestra que esto no fue una decisión ((sweeping hand motion from top to bottom)) de arriba pa bajo

> this graphic, for me, demonstrates that this was not a decision ((sweeping hand motion from top to bottom)) from top to bottom

Minutes later, she notes as she transitions to another image:

> es importante. reconocer. de que la capacidad que tenemos de tirar esas charts, los datos, presentados de esa forma. quiere decir, que sabemos lo que pasó. (.) sabemos. (.)
>
> it's important. to recognize. that the ability we have to put together these charts, the data, presented in this way. it means, that we know what happened. (.) we know. (.)

Keleher makes explicit two things: that her data is reflective of a community-centered research process (because her team reached out and obtained the data) and that because she has this data, she undoubtedly knows the truth and the best course of action. The "charts" mean that they "know." Conversely, parents, children, and teachers do not have charts or teams of researchers at their disposal to counter Keleher's data. This would not be an issue if their epistemologies and perspectives were equally valued, but as it was discussed earlier, things like trauma, a special education child's difficulty with adjusting to new settings, or quality academic programs are not the type of criteria that is relevant to the DEPR leadership.

Public education advocates on the ground were keenly aware of Keleher's utilization of data science to exclusively uphold her rationale and exclude other epistemologies or opinions. In a July 2018 radio interview, for example, a special education mother and community advocate, Jinette Morales, mentions the narrow-mindedness that stems from Keleher's over-reliance on metrics ("Radio Isla," 2018):

> aquí ha estado, ha estado la doctora keleher en:, en los medios. hablando de sus números, porque_ella_no_sabe_hablar_de_una_cosa_que_no_sean_sus_

números, de tablas. ella_cuando_tu_la_entrevistas_lo_que_te_enseñan_son_ tablas porque no puede, hablar de educación, porque, ella no es una persona, que tenga conocimientos sobre educación, ella es una administradora. ella confía en su computadora.

here there's been, dr. keleher has been here in:, in the media. talking about her numbers, because_she_doesn't_know_how_to_talk_about_anything_that_isn't_ her_ numbers, her tables. when_you_interview_her_what_she_shows_you_are _tables because she can't, talk about education, because, she isn't a person, who has knowledge about education, she is an administrator. she trusts her computer.

In this way, data gathering and analysis becomes another way to lend legitimacy to power holders –whether political, economic, or academic in nature—and delimit the boundaries of conversation. In the case of the public debate leading up to the decision to conduct massive school closures, for example, market rationale and statistical data served to filter out school communities' concerns and appeals that were not captured in Keleher's database. This is why "mi escuela es bonita" ("my school is beautiful") or "es de excelencia" ("it is of excellence"), to name a few, are instantly discarded as irrelevant and unfit for a conversation surrounding the downsizing of a budget. Keleher thus responds to and "trusts a computer" rather than the families she serves. Moreover, the presentation of select "findings" and rationalizing of violent decisions is used to create an illusion of consultancy, transparency, and dialogue between the Puerto Rican state and the public, without an actual conversation about fundamental primary questions, such as whether school closures are an adequate way to address the DEPR's budget cuts or who is to be held responsible for the fiscal crisis to begin with. The limitations of this so-called dialogue with communities is evidenced when Keleher tells an anecdote about a community member asking her not to close her school, to which she answers, "then which should I close?" and receives no answer. Discussions about public education

become solely defined by criteria such as grants, enrollment numbers, optimal resource allocation, economies of scale ("economía de escala"), among others financial factors and performance-based measures.

Another way that the Keleher administration further imbued the public education system with a neoliberal mindset was through the incorporation of a variety of business terminology and concepts that further aligned the sphere of public education with a corporate structure and culture. It could be argued that the very act of naming Keleher, a managing consultant, as Secretary of Education symbolized the complete embrace of envisioning public education not as an institution dedicated to serve students' developmental needs, but as an enterprise to be made efficient, produce measurable results, and maximize worker productivity with minimum resources. In a similar corporate fashion, the organizational structure of the Department has been completely reconfigured under Keleher, and turned 35 offices into 7. She has created new roles with business-like titles, such as "Chief Academic Officer" and "Chief Operating Officer" to head two of these seven offices. In addition, a new "Accountability" office was created with several "Data Coaches" to aid school leaders in "reviewing data to make sound decisions" (Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico, 2018c). Such a pattern is in line with school privatization models that foster managerial control, hierarchy, and prioritize "results-based" outcomes (usually in the form of test scores) over student learning and developmental needs, as well as over teachers' creativity and job satisfaction.

This neoliberal transformation, coupled with an attempt to commodify the DEPR's workers and create a large, flexible labor pool, was made apparent in the simple but important imposition of the concept of "recurso disponible" (available resource).

Under Keleher's mass school closures and consolidations, public school teachers left without a post were labeled "recursos disponible" and placed into a central database that responded to whatever need was identified by the DEPR. While this was supposed to be a remedy for massive layoffs, this resulted in rampant labor rights violations, such as changing or dismissing teachers' specialization, ignoring seniority rights, or disrupting established hiring process protocols (E. Ayala, 2018; Inter News Services, 2018a). The "recurso disponible" concept became a way to reduce teachers --with advanced degrees, specific expertise, years of experience, and relationships with specific school communities—into an abstract source of labor to be allocated according to the fiscal needs of a system. It is no surprise that some of the teachers I interviewed expressed feeling like "títeres" (puppets) or a piece of school furniture with no agency of their own.

The commodification of the public school system was perhaps most obvious in the way school campuses changed designation and eventually fell into the private sector altogether. Upon closing, beloved neighborhood schools, often named after Puerto Rican heroes and historical icons, and conceived as integral community spaces, became absorbed into a roster of government nondescript properties to be rented and sold. Upon closures, "escuelas" were stripped of their affective and communal connotations and were soon labeled as "inmuebles en desuso" (property in disuse) and "edificios en desuso" (disused building). In this way, "Escuela Charles T. Irizarry" and "Escuela Luis T. Baliña" became mere assets, right before they became sites of real estate development in 2019 (López Alicea, 2019a).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the rhetorical elements that undergird the push for neoliberal education reform in Puerto Rico at the hands of public officials. The state's discourse is deeply rooted in colonial paradigms that subjugate Puerto Rican racial others (both in relation to Eurodescedant Puerto Ricans and U.S. white elites) by deeming them unfit to be the intellectual authors of their own future and depriving them of their decision-making power. Specifically, I have demonstrated how Governor Rosselló and Julia Keleher capitalized on the inadequate state of public schools to impose a narrow set of responses in the form of school closures and privatization. Next, I demonstrated how Keleher used racial stereotypes to invisibilize working class women's work, villify oppositional forces, and trivialized school communities' suffering while casting herself as a well-meaning sacrificial white savior prototype. Further employing racial tropes, Keleher and Rosselló promoted ideas of Puerto Rican backwardness and ignorance that left the nation unprepared to embrace a technologically-advanced future. Lastly, the current administration has embedded corporate concepts in public education, attempting to leave all components of the public school at the service of the market. As we can see in Laura's experience on her first day of work of the school year, the Puerto Rican state has managed to "sell" this reconceptualization of public education to many. Yet, such ideology has not gone unchallenged. As the following chapter will demonstrate, working class Puerto Rican women led critical grassroots struggles to defend their schools and reclaim not only their public space, but the full historical-social-emotional configuration that their neighborhood schools implicated.

PART II:

ETHNOGRAPHY

The Campamento: Womanist Resistance in Defense of La Escuelita

Es como David y Goliat, yo lo comparo. Goliat es el gobierno, y nosotros David... Porque estabamos en la zona comfort. Y es que muchas han abierto los ojos, y están usando esas piedritas para ver cómo se tumba ese Goliat.
(It's like David and Goliath, is how I compare it. Goliath is the government and we are David…Because we were in the comfort zone. And people have opened their eyes, and they're using those little rocks to see how they topple Goliath.)

--Laura, at the Luis Muñoz Rivera campamento (2018)

Against a state-sponsored grand narrative that framed Puerto Ricans as needy and backwards subjects, and despite the public education policies that exacerbated peoples' limitations and suffering, women-majority educator unions and school communities engaged in a staunch battle to defend their spaces, relationships, and work. It is not difficult to see why, Laura, a special education teacher, union leader, and campamento supporter, would express to me that the small but sustained acts of resistance by community members felt like a David and Goliath struggle. Campamentos were community occupations of public school grounds in resistance to school closures, a tactic that was popular among the most marginalized neighborhoods in Puerto Rico under the Rosselló-Keleher administration. While efforts like the campamento were indeed small-scale, a close examination proves they were certainly substantial in their ability and potential to undermine an encroaching neoliberal logic. This chapter zooms in on the politics and practices of two school campamentos within the wider context of the fight against school closures and privatization models promoted by the 2018 education reform in Puerto Rico.

I explore the following questions: beyond legislative gains/losses, what do the campamentos *do* for their participants beyond? Does having a women-majority

membership have a significance in how their resistance is carried out? If so, what? How do their tactics challenge traditional notions of political participation and activism? I argue that the campamento as a political strategy and event is both a manifestation of the Puerto Rican working-class public school community and a defense of it, which allows a subversion of capitalist ideas of space, neoliberal notions of education and school workers, and colonial stereotypes of working-class Puerto Rican women. I expound this claim via six interconnected themes regarding the campamento as a) defense of the escuelita, b) intergenerational continuity and communal interdependence, c) anti-individualistic multigenerational solidarity manifesto d) womanist political project, e) platform for special education mamás pleiteras, and, f) an anti-colonial cultural affirmation front. Through these different lines of analysis, I demonstrate that the campamentos' fight to prevent their schools' closure is the surface manifestation of a deeper fight: that of working-class Puerto Rican women's struggle to have access to political power and support systems, and everyday Boricuas' ability to preserve their way of life and sense of identity as a people.

Following on a global wave of occupations as a form of political resistance (Arenas, 2011; Meek & Simonian, 2017; Rovisco & Ong, 2016; Stephen, 2013; Tejerina, Perugorría, Benski, & Langman, 2013), the case of the school campamentos in Puerto Rico gives way to the implementation of a political strategy that is also embodied by participants and is therefore subversive at multiple levels.[50]

[50] Motta's concept of "counterspatialities" allows us to grapple with the way the campamento serves as an external contestation of power between the state and a collective, but also a "reoccupation of the self" (Motta, 2014, p. 27). This "reocuppation" challenges the politics engrained in the way individuals move through the world and reproduce the everyday. The campamento entails "not just the physical occupation

The Campamento

The closing of public school campuses was touted as a part of the solution to the financial crisis and it was justified by the decrease in student enrollment. Drops in student enrollment were a byproduct of the emigration triggered by the economic conditions and the devastation of hurricane María. As mentioned earlier in this study, public school closures in Borikén have transpired since the late 90's but reached unprecedented levels in the past few years, with over 400 schools closing between 2017 and 2018. Forms of resistance against this measure were numerous, diverse, and occurred at multiple levels, including marches, letter-writing, demonstrations, press conferences, and lobbying, to name a few. Teacher unions were particularly instrumental in coordinating nation-wide efforts (e.g. calling for general strikes), as well as forging alliances with U.S.-based groups (e.g. teacher unions and community organizations),[51] and included a halt to school closures in stating their demands. In this context, the school encampment surfaced as a common grassroots tactic to prevent school campuses from being closed by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR).

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of land but a challenge to the colonization of space by neoliberal capitalist logics... This challenge occurs along multiple axes—political, social, economic, cultural, epistemological, embodied, affective, and cosmological—and reinvents the political" (Motta, 2013, p. 9).

[51] The Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (Teacher Federation of Puerto Rico) is especially active in engaging in dialogue and solidarity actions with groups through out the Americas in addition to the U.S.

Figure 3.1. A day in the Lorencita Ramírez de Arellano campamento. By Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/federaciondemaestrosdepuertorico/photos/pcb.2195870563981010/2195870377314362.

Campamentos consisted of a group of individuals who would take turns occupying the front of the main entrance of a public school scheduled to close, with some of its earliest instances dating back to 2014. Participants would often ensure that someone was present at least during business days and hours to prevent DEPR personnel from taking equipment, shutting off services, or moving materials and documents. Some campamentos, like that of the Escuela Francisco Lugo Rosa in the San Sebastian municipality, however, committed to a 24/7 occupation (*Padres levantan campamento*, 2017). In other instances, like that of the encampment at Escuela Elemental Pedro Rivera Soto in Salinas, the community closed down the school facility during the school year to impede its use until the DEPR made a written promise to desist from its plans to close it (Redacción Voces del Sur, 2018). It could be said that the beginning and end of their occupations was part of a de facto appeal process, in which, upon learning about their campus inclusion in the list of

schools set to close, communities petitioned and exerted pressure on the DEPR to reconsider its decision. Some campamentos lasted a few weeks while others went on for over 60 days (see *Table 3.1*). In the case of the two campamentos captured here (Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera in Dorado and Escuela Lorencita Ramírez de Arellano in Levittown), both had been active for at least 30 days when I joined in late July 2018 and had ended by early August.

The campamentos' leadership and organization became one of the features that set it apart from other organizing strategies. Campamentos were usually erected in communities away from major city centers and in what participants characterized as "poor neighborhoods" or serving "the poorest children." I created a map (*Figure 3.2*) of campamentos reported in social media ranging from 2014-2018 to illustrate their geographical location and as a means to document these communities' struggle that was overwhelmingly unreported in mainstream media.[52] Campamentos were organized by parents/caregivers and school employees (usually teachers and staff), many of whom had never engaged in coordinating a collective political action, although a few had in the case of LMR and LRA. Moreover, the campamento's inception was characterized by the school community members' organic desire to take action, and which then developed in a highly autonomous process. That is, entities did not arrive to organize communities in areas where schools were scheduled to close, nor were campamentos under the direction of a higher, over-arching group once they had formed, although they often did receive support from

[52] I would like to give due credit to Mercedes Martínez, President of the Federacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico, for the extensive documentation and reporting work she performs via personal and organizational media platforms. It is largely thanks to her reporting that this mapping of campamentos was made possible.

teacher unions. As a result, the profile of participants was highly diverse in terms of age, educational and professional background, and organizing experience. In virtually all cases, however, women, children, and youth comprised the majority of its membership.

Table 3.1
Campamento Map Legend and Description

# in Map	Name of School	Location	Dates Active[53]
1	Escuela Francisco Lugo Rosa	Culebrinas, San Sebastián	Began May 10, 2017; 24/7 occupation; lasted 12+ days
2	Escuela Elemental Los Caños	Tanamá, Arecibo	Began May 27, 2015; 24/7 occupation; lasted 2+ days
3	Escuela José Melendez Ayala II	Boquillas, Manatí	Began late May, 2015; Lasted 66+ days
4	Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera	Mameyal, Dorado	Began June 28, 2018; Lasted 40 days
5	Escuela Lorencita Ramírez de Arellano	Levittown, Toa Baja	Began July 1st, 2018; Lasted 24+ days
6	Escuela Elemental John F. Kennedy	Levittown, Toa Baja	Began June 7, 2017; 24/7 occupation; Victorious after 28 days.
7	Escuela Luis Santaella	Sonadora, Aguas Buenas	Began May 7, 2017, lasted 31+ days
8	Escuela Elemental Parcelas de Campo Rico	Campo Rico, Canóvanas	Began June 1st 2014; unknown duration
9	Escuela Inés Encarnación	Luquillo, Fajardo	Began May 21, 2017; unknown duration
10	Escuela Elemental Maria Isabel Dones	Barrio Luis M. Cintrón, Fajardo	Began May 10, 2015; victorious after 37 days.
11	Escuela Desiderio Mendez Rodriguez	Maizales, Naguabo	Began May 26, 2015; 24/7 occupation; victorious after 11 days
12	Escuela Lutgarda Rivera Reyes	Naguabo	Began June 1, 2014; 24/7 occupation; unknown duration
13	Escuela Pepita López	Humacao	Began May 2014; 24/7 occupation; victorious after ~45 days
14	Escuela Cornelio Ayala Fonseca	Caguas	Began June, 2015; unknown duration
15	Escuela Pedro Soto Rivera	Guayama, Salinas	Began April 26, 2018; lasted 15+days

[53] I list here as much of the information as I was able to retrieve from my research. Whenever possible, I indicate start and end dates of campamentos, of whether they were permanent (24/7 occupation). I indicate a "+" for the last known date for which I found evidence of the campamento being active (e.g. If an occupation began June 1st and I found evidence of it still standing on June 7th, I indicate "lasted 7+ days," as no end date was found).

Figure 3.2. Campamentos held in school communities between 2014-2018.

* * *

21 años de artes visuales [redacted] La clase trabajadora, los maestros están sufriendo [redacted] desorganización [redacted] no se está considerando el magisterio [redacted] siempre está siendo atropellado

[redacted] horrible [redacted] penoso [redacted] difícil

[redacted] los niños [redacted] los más afectados

[redacted]
mi especialidad [redacted] no es la mas valorada [redacted] un proceso arduo [redacted] Toa Alta [comunidad muy positiva, responsable,
pude darle valor a mi clase dentro de lo que enfrenta el sistema educativo…ya había una falta de valorización hacia esa materia…yo como maestra no me agrada el sistema de pupitre, pizarra. Cuando me quedo en esa escuela [redacted] quité pizarra, hice proyectos donde se crea un oficio y crea un poco de incomodidad dentro del sistema…hice esos cambios pq yo me sentía satisfecha [redacted] educación debe ser mas experimental… [redacted] he tenido 2 cierres en el mismo ciclo.

[redacted] antes [redacted] de una forma mas libre [redacted] autonomía para poder hacer y ser mas creativa. Ahora [redacted] "tenemos [redacted] tenemos [redacted] carpetas y carpetas, el estándar [redacted]
Compartiendo y experiencias, voy a lograr más que llenando carpetas.
El magisterio tiene que defender sus derechos.

[redacted] Los padres trabajaron todo el verano [redacted] 24/7 [redacted] pintaron.

Nos dejaron un año más [redacted]

* * *

A. The Campamento as Defense of the Escuelita. There is no denying that the campamento was, in its most practical sense, a defense of school campuses, but more precisely, the "escuelita" (little school). The term "escuelita" appears to occupy a special space in the Puerto Rican imaginary that is at once a physical space of interaction and a receptacle of social memory. Children and adults alike employed the term "escuelita" to refer to the schools they strongly defended. "Mi Escuelita" is also the title of a famous Puerto Rican children's song that talks about a young student's love for her school ("yo la quiero con amor"). The escuelita is dear to this student for this is the place where she learns ("porque en ella…aprendo mi lección"), has respectful interactions with her teacher ("saludo a mi maestra"), and works diligently ("después a mi trabajo"). This song is easy to access and is regarded as a "folk song," signaling both its old age and popularity. "Mi escuelita" is truly of popular domain, and hints at a common Puerto Rican relationship with their school that is generally positive, amorous, and innocent. La escuelita experience denotes the learning of particular games and songs (such as "La Escuelita" itself), the observance of certain dates such as the "Semana de la Puertorriqueñidad" (Week of Puerto Rican-ness), and the social and cultural protocols learned as children (such as showing respect in communication). The "escuelita" continues to have resonance in Borikén today: it was the central aspect of one the books here consulted by Puerto Rican scholar Ángela López Borrero (*Mi escuelita: Educación y arquitectura en Puerto Rico*, 2005), and it is in the name of multiple schools in both Puerto Rico and educational programs in continental U.S. with ties to the Boricua diaspora.

The escuelita, as a concept captured in name and song, reflects a widespread Puerto Rican childhood experience in working-class neighborhoods—one that varied in specifics but that all share as part of a national memory of their upbringing in the Archipelago. That is, two individuals who may not come from the same Puerto Rican neighborhood, or who may find themselves outside of Borikén altogether, may invoke the idea of "la escuelita" and connect over a common understanding of childhood experiences in the context of the Puerto Rican working class local public school. By contrast, it is unlikely that a young Boricua would refer to the school in their neighborhood as "mi escuelita" if she resides outside Puerto Rico, and far less likely that both the child *and* her parent would use such wording to refer to the same building. One of my interviewees, Shariana Ferrer from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, explained the ties between Puerto Rican public schools and their students. "Hay un sentido de pertenencia" (there's a sense of belonging) she said of her conversations with high school youth who opposed their school's closure. "El estudiante tiene un apego con su escuela" (The student has an attachment to their school) she continued, "en la gran mayoría de los casos, es la que le queda más cerca de sus casa" (In the vast majority of cases, it's the one that's closest to their home). Interestingly, the word "pertenencia" can be translated to denote a sense of belonging or of ownership over something, both of which were made apparent in campamentos. The strictly Puerto Rican dyad of place and embodied childhood is unified in the escuelita, which resides both in a physical space and the Boricua imaginary.

There is evidence that this shared sense of nostalgia for the past, a connection to the Puerto Rican experience, and sense of *pertenencia* connected to the neighborhood

school is powerful enough to travel across the Atlantic as part of the Boricua diaspora. This is curiously found in Manuel Guzmán's (2008) study of "La Escuelita," a "'gay' Latino club" in New York established shortly after the Stonewall Riots.[54] Guzmán explains how the club, located in a building in disuse that once served as a school for dental hygienists, earned its name from its original patrons who were "mostly Spanish-speaking immigrants." "Puerto Rican patrons, specifically, wrote [on the blackboards] the lyrics of 'Mi escuelita', a famous Puerto Rican song for children extolling the virtues of children's love for knowledge" (213). If the history of settler colonialism has taught us anything about naming is that it has the power to both claim ownership and infuse it with meaning. While the actual sign outside the locale read "The School," the club patrons "felt like they owned a space that they and no one in particular had named La Escuelita" (213). The *collective* naming of a space by and for queer Latinx immigrants, where they could be themselves in the face of racism, economic oppression, and homophobia/transphobia, is profound. The word "escuelita," borrowed from a Puerto Rican childhood experience, comes to signify a shared ethnic background and identity (puertorriqueñidad), a diasporic condition of nostalgia for the homeland and the past, as well as a sense of belonging and safety. Boricuas, it could be said, inhabit in their respective escuelitas but the escuelita as social memory and sense of place also resides in them. The sense of *pertenencia* that Shariana mentions is thus underscored, both through the collective ownership over a physical space and through the sense of belonging to a

[54] While Guzmán cites one of the original founders as providing this approximate date, recent news stories regarding the Escuelita state that the club was established in 1966 (with eventual relocations). In a sad connection to the escuelitas in Borikén, the club officially closed its doors in 2016, with the owner declaring that the forces of gentrification, hostile to queer people of color, had brought its demise: "Minorities are no longer welcome on W. 39th St., as they do not fit into the gentrification plans of the city" (Alcorn & Rayman, 2017).

social group. Thus in the case of queer Nuyoricans experiencing homophobia and racism in continental U.S., "la escuelita" entails a sense of safety and support.

Truly, for some of the most vulnerable sectors in Puerto Rico, namely poor communities and children, public schools have served as shelters in their most literal form. School communities frequently mentioned the fact that their schools were state-designated "refugios" (refuge or shelters) as one of the many reasons why their campus should not be closed. This designation spoke both to the quality of their school buildings– since they met certain structural standards and had survived hurricane Maria--, but also to a collective lived experience of hardship, trauma, and mutual aid in the context of a natural disaster. During and after the hurricane, public schools protected residents against inclement weather, acted as sites of resource distribution and communal kitchens, and served as homes for families who saw their homes destroyed or uninhabitable (Education Week, 2018; Hernández Pérez, 2018; "If A School Becomes A Shelter In Puerto Rico, Where Do Students Learn?," 2017). In the face of gross governmental inefficiency and neglect, school grounds were the backgrounds against which residents engaged in volunteer-initiated efforts to support one another even when they, too, found themselves in precarious conditions.

In light of this, the fact that Miguel, a young elementary school student at LMR, unexpectedly included "el huracán" (the hurricane) in an interview response about his school proves completely relevant. The following is an excerpt from his answer when he is asked why he is taking part of a protest staged in front of the DEPR headquarters:

> Miguel: Yo estoy aquí porque no quiero que cierren mi escuela, ya les cerraron muchas escuelas a los otros nenes y en verdad, no quiero que cierren más ná porque la nuestra, la otra, y hay muchos nenes que todavía no han aprendido…el huracán…esto, y yo estoy aquí para que no la cierren.

> Miguel: I am here because I don't want them to close my school, they already closed many schools for other children and really, I don't want them to close anything else because ours, the other, and there are many children who still haven't learned…the hurricane…this, and I am here so that they don't close it.

Given the key role that neighborhood public schools played in the most recent natural disaster to sweep the Island, this young boy's reference to hurricane Maria in a conversation about an academic institution is not at all random nor accidental. A historically informed understanding of the place that the public school occupies in a Puerto Rican community, especially in its most vulnerable sectors, would reveal the crucial resource for families struggling to survive, helping them meet their most essential needs of shelter and food in natural disasters. In fact, of the 499 facilities that the government of Puerto Rico listed as shelters in the wake of hurricane Maria, an astounding 426 (85%) of shelters are identified as public schools (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2017). For millions of families across the Archipelago, their neighborhood school was literally and symbolically, a refuge. While it is not clear whether Miguel himself used his school as a shelter, his mention of "muchos nenes" (many children), his desire to keep his escuelita open, and a natural disaster, demonstrates that he is clearly aware of the safety and support that this place entails for Puerto Rican working class children.

Considering Borikén's documented history of natural disasters (Metro Puerto Rico, 2017), its vulnerability as an island, and with more frequent and extreme meteorological events on the horizon due to climate change (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2016), the public school as a resource for Puerto Rican families is not to be taken lightly. As New York public school teacher and union leader, Jia Lee pointed after having volunteered in relief efforts, the charterization of the Puerto Rican public

school system would make relief efforts extremely difficult in the face of a disaster of similar magnitude (2018). With charter schools enjoying a great degree of autonomy over their grounds and policies, as well as little to no collaboration with other schools or charter networks (their "competitors"), it is easy to see how much more complex and difficult it would be to coordinate efforts that thrive on cooperation.[55] Even more alarmingly, schools operating under the charter model may decide not to participate in relief initiatives at all, or dictate how and whom to support, opening the door to potential discrimination and exclusion.

It is no wonder that the campamentos were a testament to these collective histories of struggle and belonging borne out of the interaction of school community members and their respective campuses. Their messaging highlighted their escuelita's assets and unique qualities, seeing their strengths when the state focused on their shortcomings and disposability. The language and visuals used to construct this act of civil disobedience communicated these affective ties to their *escuelita*. Although some were much more simple in their displays, a handful hung a number of items on their school's front gates as part of their campamento, including handmade signs, toys, backpacks, and student uniforms that featured their school's logo. In this way, people of all ages and backgrounds had an opportunity to "decorate" the space and contribute to its appearance. At Luis Muñoz Rivera, which enjoyed long-term support from the school

[55] I witnessed this dynamic of charter system policy hodge-podge first hand at a meeting of "English Language Learners stakeholders" in the greater New Orleans area, which gathered educators and advocates working to support ELL students. The landscape of policies and support that surfaced from the discussion ranged from schools where ELL programs were deficient or nonexistent (the majority), to a handful that were doing their best and felt overburdened. By the end of the meeting, two ideas became apparent: 1) even if a set of best practices and programs were identified, the amount of "convincing" needed to get each individual charter school/network to apply them would stump the best organizer, and 2) adequately serving some of the most vulnerable student populations was "bad business" for a charter, as it attracted students with similar profiles and drove the school's "rating" (i.e. test scores) down.

community and had relatively steady numbers occupying the campamento, dozens of backpacks and posters hung, along with a large Puerto Rican flag. On a regular basis, people set up a gazebo for shade, brought chairs, a large table, food to share, water and other drinks. In some of my interview recordings, there is a radio playing salsa music in the background, children at play, cars passing by with music blasting. A neighbor volunteered her nearby home for participants who needed to use the bathroom, thus becoming the default campamento restroom. In short, these spaces were made as homey and personal as possible both *through* community contributions and *in the image* of its community.

This sense of belonging and protection of what school communities felt as theirs was articulated through the signage, frameworks, and *consignas* (chants) that were created. While many of the demonstrations I attended tended to have mass-printed, uniform picket signs for protestors, those used in campamentos tended to be made by community members and often featured messages unique to their own localized struggle.[56] At the José Melendez Ayala school in the Manatí municipality, for instance, on of the signs tied to its fence read "Esta es mi escuela y yo la quiero y la defiendo" (This is my school and I love it and defend it). At Luis Muñoz Rivera, signs with colorful stickers on their gates read "¡Este es mi lugar, nadie me moverá!" (This is my place, nobody will move me!), "No cierren mi escuela" (Don't close my school), and "¡Cierran escuelas de barriadas y Rosselló con su blindada!" (They close schools in the ghetto and Rosselló with his armor-plated [truck]!)

[56] In instances where campamentos had members who were part of teacher unions or became members of a union in the process, leadership from these professional organizations would often visit the campamentos and provide materials (such as a banner or posters), legal support, and/or organizing advice.

By being particular to each campamentos, these posters and chants enhanced the sense of shared neighborhood space, and emphasized the idea that something special and unlike any other place existed there. That is, while there is a general *escuelita* experience, per se, each is truly unique for it is a reflection of the interaction between unique individuals and their neighborhood. In the case of the LMR signage, for example, the use of "barriadas" (ghetto or shantytown) in self-reference recognizes a class condition shared by at the same time that it denounces the fact that it is poor communities that are disproportionately affected by school closures. Once again, this points to the specificity of the campamento as a Puerto Rican struggle intimately with class against Puerto Rican economic-political elites (represented by Rosselló in his expensive car); an instance of working-class solidarity. While racial struggle is not explicitly invoked in this message, it is certainly made evident both through the heavy afrodescendiente presence in these communities, as well as the documented connection between racial and economic oppression in Puerto Rico (Denton & Villarrubia, 2007). Hence, a national political issue is articulated through the realities of particular communities.

It could be argued that this people-place feedback bond in Puerto Rican neighborhood public schools is an advanced version of what cities and foundations across the U.S. are spending millions[57] to create via "placemaking" initiatives. Defined as "strengthening the connection between people and the places they share," placemaking pays "particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution" (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). Neighborhood public schools have

[57] Artplace of America alone has spent over $100 million funding placemaking projects across the U.S. since 2011.

been a site where multiple generations have come together to coexist, socialize, reproduce cultural traditions, and share knowledge. This perhaps explains why, on my first day at the LMR campamento, a second-grade boy and his former teacher co-led the group in chants: despite the generational difference and social roles, they were both invested in saving their escuelita as a shared public space. They found it valuable, useful, meaningful; they *loved* it. This intimate connection to the space is seen above in the use of the possessive ("mi escuela," "mi lugar"), was often coupled with the diminutive of school (*escuelita*), producing term of endearment ("mi escuelita"), as discussed earlier. Such sentiments were frequently echoed by community members and alumni when they found out about their closure or its threat to do so. "How I miss all those acts [sic] at mi escuelita and missing my beloved teachers. ily" comments one social media user regarding the Escuela Theodore Roosevelt[58] in Mayagüez. "Wow such beautiful memories in that escuelita," another one adds. "Our school like no other" agrees someone else. Examples like these abound and demonstrate that what was communicated in campamentos was in line with the sentiments of the wider school community, even after individuals may have graduated, moved residence, or their families no longer participated in school activities.

[58] Though, to my knowledge, the Escuela Theodore Roosevelt did not erect a campamento, members of the school community did engage in public protest and were part of a multi-campus, ongoing legal battle against the DEPR. Although they brought up a strong case and were backed by their town's local government in the lawsuit, the court unfortunately ruled in favor of the DEPR's right to close numerous Mayagüez public schools.

Figure 3.3. School community members and supporters begin congregating for a townhall at the campamento Luis Muñoz Rivera.

Campamentos were therefore a way for school communities to create a physical representation of their values and an ethos of self-worth, directly opposed to the colonial and neoliberal worldview of spaces as mere assets, of people as statistics, of students as expenses. While there was a wide range of experiences and variance in details, the images, videos, and reports of campamentos across the board communicate an occupation as a reclamation of public space, as a marking of personal connection and the defense of this relationship. What is missing from the material culture of the campamento and the ideological frameworks that stemmed from it is equally significant. Despite the fact that enrollment counts, student performance, the condition/safety of campus grounds, and total annual expenses were mentioned by the state as the criteria possibly used for

deciding on closings (this was never made clear), none of these appear in the posters or *consignas* reviewed. While this information was known and referenced by encampment participants, especially when speaking to the media, the visuals of the *campamento* demonstrate that these points were not at the core of their value system and political manifesto. That is, we see that occupations were a clear defense not of a building or a continuation of services, but of *their escuelita*.

Thus the 2018 education reform exacerbated public school closures and introduced the charter model ("escuelas alianza"), but also threatened a physical community pillar in Puerto Rican society, the escuelita. At one level, these policies literally locked school communities out of the places that had for decades served as a resource for some of the most marginalized Puerto Ricans. At another, they threatened the very idea of the neighborhood school as a site of a working-class Puerto Rican childhood and innocence, which spans across generations and geographical space. Both of these significances are completely missing from a neoliberal conception of the public school as simply a group of classrooms, didactic materials, human capital, and technology for the purpose of transferring information to children. It is these ulterior meanings of the escuelita that campamento insists upon. The campamento as a hyper-localized political struggle should therefore be seen as an effort to reclaim the neighborhood public school as a source of essential and tangible support for working class communities, which has and continues to be nurtured by the social memory of the escuelita.

* * *

Waiting to Hear, Aug. 6, 2018

[redacted] She had 5 children [redacted] her husband [redacted] a useless cheating prick [redacted] Her first child at 13! [redacted] a little laugh [redacted] half-embarrassment half-travesura [redacted] She worked in a hotel [redacted] Divorced her husband. Never looked back [redacted] she has had suitors [redacted] not interested [redacted] ex husband has tried [redacted] she's done (claps to dust her hands) [redacted] she's traveled…Florida, Connecticut, Chicago…her children are all over [redacted] she's in her early 70's. [redacted] after the hurricane, they left to Chicago [redacted]

[redacted] fighting for the school [redacted] she had been a student there [redacted] her siblings [redacted] all her children [redacted] her granddaughters [redacted] "no podian dejar solas a las maestras" [redacted]

wating to hear [redacted]

school [redacted]

open [redacted]

she could bring her granddaughters back [redacted] if they couldn't open the school [redacted] they wouldn't come back. [redacted]

she couldn't be taking them to another school. [redacted] make her life in the US [redacted]

she had talked [redacted] so much about her house [redacted] she cleans it every day [redacted] decorates it [redacted] her furniture made with concrete [redacted] people tell her it's so nice [redacted] she keeps her patio very clean [redacted] organized [redacted] she doesn't like to have a bunch of junk [redacted] paid someone $30 to come clean out everything [redacted] She cries [redacted] her niñas who suffer [redacted] the school closing [redacted] "no te imaginas cuánto me arrodillado" [redacted] she cries [redacted] her babies and the school [redacted] "es que no es facil, no es facil."

* * *

B. The Campamento as Intergenerational Continuity and Communal Interdependence.

Campamento organizing both highlighted and protected the way community schools gave rise to and sustained extensive relationships of reciprocity and care that ran across time and space. Because over 2700 schools were built in Puerto Rico during the first thirty years of U.S. rule (National Park Service, n.d.), the public school slowly became enmeshed in the social fabric of communities, especially in areas that otherwise had less access to public communal spaces. As a result, some families had attended the same school for several generations, and in some cases, community members had known school personnel for several decades. Brenda, a mother, told me about how both she, her siblings, and her mother all attended the same school. As previously mentioned, Consuelo, a grandmother, shared that her husband, her children, and her granddaughters had all attended Luis Muñoz Rivera. During a conversation at the campamento, I once inquired about two young boys and their mother, who would sometimes come to support and had attended a demonstration in front of the DEPR offices. Teacher Marta smiled confidently, "I taught him and I taught his father." In my observations and interviews surrounding actions against school closings, relocations, and privatization, it was not uncommon for teachers and staff to mention the length of their service. These were details that brought together their professional histories and physical contexts, and which individuals asserted as a source of pride in their labor and legacy. School personnel and community members alike cherished these connections among each other and their corresponding schools, indicative of the depth of their roots to their neighborhoods and sense of shared experiences. In the context of the fight to keep

schools open, these advocates' statements could be seen as embracing their role in the collective history of a community, and consequently, staking a claim to decide its fate.

These social ties were not limited to students, alumni, and school personnel, but often extended to entire families and neighbors. Below I share an excerpt from my fieldwork that further expands on this theme, narrating the events of a time one of the campamento teachers, Marta, offered to give me a ride home. On this day, news that the staff had been officially moved to the receiving school were announced, thus bringing the campamento to an end. It was an emotionally draining day for all, and Marta was visibly affected.

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August 6, 2018

We drove through the Dorado streets while Marta talked to her daughter about some of the items she had brought to the person she was about to visit, and how it was necessary to make a stop there before we left town. We reached a house not too far from LMR, and Marta went inside the home while we stayed in the car talking. Her eldest daughter, a young university student, smiled as she told me that her mother worried about being neglectful and uncaring towards this person despite the fact that she had been coming to his home almost every day throughout the summer. He is a cancer patient, she explained. Having recently supported a loved one going through cancer treatment, I told her I was very sorry to hear that and that I understood it was certainly difficult to play the role of a supporter. I asked if this person was their relative. "No, it's her former student's uncle," she answered. I was left speechless by Marta's compassion and commitment to her students and their families, not only because she had been doing this routine for weeks, but because on a day that had been devastating for her spirit, she still found energy and love to bestow onto her community. About 15 to 20 minutes later, Marta joined us in the car, apologizing for the wait but otherwise not saying much.

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As seen by the vignette above, the public school is truly a nucleus for community building that transcends classroom walls, employee roles, and student-school personnel relationships. In the case of Marta, who visits a community member suffering from a

terminal illness, we can see just how extensive and caring these school-facilitated communal ties can be. This is made apparent considering that Marta's regular visitations took place in the summer (when school is not in session and she is theoretically on vacation), her connection to this person is through a *former* student, and the patient is a member of the boy's extended family. Marta travels to provide her support and continues to show care to her the boy's family even though he is no longer her student. It is obvious that Marta's actions are not dictated nor confined by her job description under the DEPR, but that they respond to the particular realities and needs of her school community. Her gesture speaks to relationships that are much more involved, multifaceted, meaningful, and long-lasting than those established by a teaching contract or even traditional ideas of a teacher's function in society. Moreover, Marta's deep involvement in her students' lives—whether current or former—demonstrate her thorough knowledge and understanding of their material realities, family life, and their social-emotional needs. She holds undeniable expertise not only as a professional with extensive pedagogical experience, but also as an observer and mediator of the different spheres that her students inhabit. In turn, Marta's students and their families know her and appreciate not only as a public worker and service provider, but also as a friend, caretaker, and loved one. Thus Marta was not just a number in an employee roster at Luis Muñoz Rivera; to extract Marta from the school where she had served for over 25 years would be to displace her as a vital member of a community, and entail a loss to the larger community of Mameyal, Dorado.

Whereas Marta extends her involvement with her students to reach their families and school neighbors, school community members similarly "reach back" to seek the

welfare of their school workers. I share here an experience from my fieldwork where I accompanied Brenda and her son Michael to his first day of school following the closure of LMR.

> August 13, 2018
> Many of the rooms we visited were now being staffed by former LMR school workers who, after an unrelenting fight, had managed to reach an unheard of agreement with the district: to be transferred to the receiving school as a team, including support personnel such as their social worker and cafeteria staff. If we came across them, Brenda greeted them, she knew them well. She chatted for a minute with some of them as students and parents trickled in to the school and their respective classrooms. At one point, we stopped by the cafeteria and stood at the door, peeping in. The workers, three middle-aged dark-skinned women, were at the very end of the room, facing away and busy at work. Brenda said a few loud hellos before they actually turned around. Two of them came towards us. Brenda inquired about the whereabouts of another woman who also worked at LMR, but one of the cafeteria workers said she was not going to be working at this school. They engaged in small talk about how they had been, and Brenda eventually requested that they please look out for her son. The two women responded that she knew they "would keep an eye on him." We said goodbye and continued our way to the next school building, where we saw and briefly spoke with several other former LMR teachers.

Brenda's first-day-of-school experience gives us insight into the multidirectional care that we might find among members of the average Puerto Rican public school community, as well as alternative concepts of what constitutes a school as a learning facility. Brenda's touching base with nearly all the former LMR school employees, and even some that were not, allowed her to reaffirm her presence in their lives despite being in a new school year and in a new setting. It was as if she were trying to remind them that she was still a presence in their lives despite the fact that they all, as a school community, had been forced into a new space and configuration. It is important to note that Brenda does not only check in with school employees who enjoy social status or have certain degree of power over her son's academic standing. Brenda is not networking; no potential economic or social capital is incurred by her interactions. She is not simply socializing or

passing the time because she is off work that day. She is engaging in a short but extensive "checking in" process with members of her school community—both old and new. The cafeteria workers, the teacher, and the social worker alike, are to Brenda a part of the larger community of adults that she cares about and whom she entrusts with looking after her child's wellbeing. The cafeteria workers, in turn, reassure her that they are in fact looking out for Michael.

Such systems of familiarity, trust, and mutual care have real consequences, especially for a young afrodescendiente growing up in a working class community like Brenda's son. While the government of Puerto Rico fails to keep data on the ways race factors into educational outcomes and other quality of life measures, studies have documented excessive police force and abuse of power against Black Puerto Ricans and Dominican immigrants (most of whom are read as Black in Puerto Rico) communities (Departamento de Justicia de los Estados Unidos: División de Derechos Civiles, 2011; Figuero Cancel, 2018a). In addition, a recent case of racial harassment at a school in Carolina opened conversations in the public about interpersonal and systematic discrimination against Puerto Rican poor and afrodescendiente youth, both in the public education and criminal justice systems (Arroyo Pizarro, 2017; Denis, 2017; Primera Hora, 2017b; Rodríguez Lebrón, 2017). Alma Yarida, a young Black special education student was bullied with racist epithets for two years with no administrative action, but was suspended, arrested, and given three charges when she pushed one of her aggressors in self-defense. Considering decades-long research of the insidious links among youth criminalization, state race-based violence, and the school setting (García Hernández, 2015; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Sojoyner, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014), a

parent ensuring that she knows and trusts her son's school workers is not only socially enhancing but life-saving. These connections increase the likelihood of guidance, nurturance, understanding, de-escalation in the face of conflict, a call to a mother rather than a call to the police. Thus the social protective circles that mothers like Brenda have created and tend to result in strengthened systems of support that benefit the entire school community, but especially the children most affected by systems of oppression as manifested in the school setting, including Black and disabled youth.

The reach of these relational webs in school communities is truly remarkable. Once Brenda and I concluded our morning visit to her son's receiving school, she engaged in a detailed conversation with her husband about Michael's first day of school, including where he had been placed, her concern about being in the same classroom with a little boy he had had issues with, and the classroom assignments of every teacher (by name and grade) that had taken part in the LMR campamento, and even the process that was required for some of them to secure their positions. While some may argue that Marta is simply an exceptional case rather than the norm, Brenda's conversation with her husband confirms the existence of extended *networks* of familiarity and mutual concern born out of the school community. That is, Marta was not a singular, isolated case in Puerto Rico, but an instance of the numerous bonds that had solidified at LMR and that could be arguably found across Puerto Rican public schools. Although it was Brenda who was present at the campamento and actions when I visited (she was on leave from her work as a paramedic and her husband held multiple jobs), her husband was well aware of their struggle and knew the different actors involved. In updating her husband about the new organizational structure at the receiving school campus, Brenda did not have to

explain who was who in her conversation even though many of the school personnel had not been her son Michael's current or formerly assigned teachers. Her husband knew their names, the grade or subjects they taught. It is significant that Brenda deems it important to talk about the new assignments of various former LMR teachers, and it is just as important that her husband cares to know about them. In short, for Michael's parents, a conversation about their son's first day of school entails not just an update on how he reacted to his new school or an opinion of his new teacher; rather, it is a more comprehensive report of the space and individuals that make Michael's former and present educational context. Their involvement and knowledge of the workings of Michael's school community defies racialized stereotypes of Puerto Rican working class families as ignorant of what is best for their children's education and the school as an institution, both of which were suggested by state leaders (see chapter 1). On the contrary, these brief but telling episodes from the field demonstrate that it is Julia Keleher and Ricardo Rosselló (the purported experts) who are out of touch and ill-informed about the role that public schools play in Puerto Rican students' education and the wellbeing of the entire nation.

C. The Campamento as an Anti-Individualistic Multigenerational Solidarity Manifesto. The bonds of solidarity among fellow school community members were made evident through the struggle of the school campamentos, and effectively refused the capitalist, individualist competition imposed via the education reform law. It was striking to observe the number of times participants –regardless of age or role in the school community—mentioned fellow school community members as the reason they fought to keep their schools open. This was also evidenced through physical actions in the act of

joining a campamento. The campamento in this way brings together both an embodied and discursive philosophy of social responsibility and solidarity.

Although a large number of advocates that took part at the LMR and LRA campamentos were directly impacted by the decision to close their respective schools, it is important to highlight that many individuals spoke of the impact on their fellow community members as the driving force behind their actions. This was true even among the youngest of participants. Days before Puerto Rican public school teachers' first day of work of the school year, the LMR campamento organized and staged a peaceful demonstration in front of the DEPR headquarters to demand a meeting with the Secretary of Education. As we waited for her to arrive, parent advocate and organizer Marlene interviewed two young boys partaking in the protest. The boys, Luis and Michael, were between 7 to 10 years old and had been regular participants of the LMR encampment, with the eldest (Luis) having been enrolled in the LMR special education program for four consecutive years. Marlene, wanting to capture young voices and share their perspectives on social media, inquired as to why were they there, what did they like about their school, and what would they say to the Secretary should she concede them a meeting with their group. The following are two excerpts from their responses.

> Luis: Yo soy Luis Gómez de la escuela-- vengo Luis Muñoz Rivera. Yo estoy aquí porque no quiero que cierren mi escuela, ya les cerraron muchas escuelas a los otros nenes y en verdad, no quiero que cierren mas ná porque…la nuestra, la otra, y hay muchos nenes que todavía no han aprendido
> […] Que no la cierre porque no quiero que [Keleher] la cierre, mi amigo ((motions towards the boy beside him)) no quiere que la cierren. No así, no así…

> Luis: I am Luis Gómez from the school—I come Luis Muñoz Rivera. I am here because I don't want them to close my school, they already closed many schools for other children and really, I don't want them to close anything else because ours, the other, and there are many children who still haven't learned […] To not

> close it because I don't want [Keleher] to close it, my friend (motions towards the boy beside him) doesn't want them to close it. Not like that, not like that…
>
> ***
>
> Michael: Que ya no cierre más escuelas…y también, hay muchos niños—como de 4 o 5 años, menores, ¡que todavía no han aprendido! Entonces, ¿que vamos hacer? ¿Vamos a dejar que cierren nuestra escuela? Nooo…Hay que mantenerla abierta. Hasta ahora vamos a pelear. Esta lucha no se va acabar, hasta que nos abran nuestra escuela.
>
> Michael: To not close any more schools…and also, there's many children—like four or five-year olds, minors, who still haven't learned! So then, what are we going to do? We're going to let them close our school? Nooo…we have to keep it open. We will fight now. This struggle will not end, until they open our school.

Although several elements stand out in these young boys' declarations, I will focus my discussion on the theme of mutual care and solidarity. First, despite the short length of their interview and the fact that they have not been interviewed numerous times, these two children choose to make reference to the situation experienced by *other members* of their particular school community and even those *outside* of it. This choice is also interesting because the interviewer does not ask about other children or schools, but the boys nevertheless make other children (his friend, and four and five-year olds) and their educational spaces relevant to their current participation in a political struggle. Their statements do not only talk about their personal hardship or desires, but also highlight their awareness and concern over the many children who have already been affected by school closings and the many more who may be deprived from an education should this pattern continue. It is their concern over other children together with their particular school's function that propels them to take action, and even vow to never desist until their demands are met.

The sentiment of taking part in the encampment as an act of care and solidarity rather than an individual or self-serving investment was expressed by other members. In fact, just minutes after Luis and Michael's interviews were recorded, this theme once again surfaced as we began to picket on the DEPR headquarters' sidewalk. Cassandra, school council president and special education teacher for 15 years at LMR, was approached by a radio reporter for an interview. I highlight here the beginning of their exchange.

> Interviewer: ¿Su reacción con este posible cierre de este plantel escolar? Se ha hablado mucho de la situación de los maestros en términos de dónde irían a trabajar. ¿Cuál es su caso particular?
> Cassandra: El caso de los maestros en este momento no es tan importante para nosotros. Para nosotros es importante—por lo menos para esta servidora como profesora de educación especial por tantos años, a mi lo que me preocupa de todo esto es los niños de educación especial…
>
> Interviewer: Your reaction with this possible closing of this school campus? There's been talks about the situation of teachers, in terms of where they might go work. What is your particular case?
> Cassandra: The case of teachers at this moment is not very important for us. For us what is important—at least for myself as a special eduacation teacher for so many years, what I'm concerned about all this is the special education children…

Similar to the children interviewed, even though she is not asked about other members of the school community, Cassandra positions others front and center. She skilfully reframes the issue of their school closure from herself as a teacher in an uncertain professional field, to the children that would likely be affected. In the interview, she goes on to thoroughly explain the services and facilities that are made available at LMR and the tedious bureaucratic process that awaits families of special education students should a school be consolidated, thus jeopardizing the quality of student's education and their overall wellbeing. Cassandra's knowledge of the special education system *from a*

parent's and child's perspective and her empathizing with these families is not to be taken for granted, for many specialized professionals often do not understand nor empathize with the experiences lying outside their immediate responsibilities (a doctor, for example, may be clueless about how an undocumented patient may gain access to healthcare). Cassandra's awareness of her special education students' lives and her decision to place them front and center in her media appearance are therefore a testament to a long history of dedication and care for her school community.

Lourdes, a member of the school staff, similarly expressed concern not only for her personal wellbeing in the midst of this chaotic shift in public education, but for the wellbeing of her students. The following is a sample from a group conversation we had while sitting at the LMR encampment. Lourdes is narrating her experience at her corresponding district office, where public school personnel were being convened in unprecedented numbers to receive their assignments for the school year. (Bracketed words denote comments from other members of the group as Lourdes spoke.)

> Lourdes: yo le digo, 'yo no peleo ni protesto por mí, porque yo trabajo puedo conseguir donde yo quiera! ["Exactamente!" "Claro, claro"] Donde yo quiera, ["es que te tienen que ubicar, es que es permanente!"] yo puedo conseguir un trabajo donde yo quiera… porque obviamente pues confío en Dios, y Dios sabe todas las cosas, y Dios provee ["exactamente!"] y siempre he sido una persona que ha trabajado en mi vida desde los 16 años. Pero yo peleo porque ellos se creen que nosotros somos una silla que pueden mover de un lado a otro ["exactamente, tan feliz"] sin pensar como se afecta uno, como se afectan los niños ["todos, todos"] ¡Cómo se afecta todo!
>
> Lourdes: I tell her, 'I do not fight and protest for my sake, because I can find work wherever I want! ["Exactly!" "Of course, of course"] Wherever I want, ["it's because they have to assign you, that is permanent!"] I can secure work wherever I want…because obviously I trust God, and God knows everything, and God provides ["Exactly!"] and I've always been a person who has worked all my life since the age of 16. But I fight because they think that we are a chair that they can move from place to place ["Exactly, so happy"] without thinking about how one

> is affected, how the children are affected [“Everyone, everyone”] How everything is affected!

Like Cassandra, Lourdes highlights not only her individual welfare and labor issues, but the interconnected system of which she and her school community are a part. As she communicates, Lourdes is not primarily concerned with her hierability, as past work history and her religious beliefs afford her a certain degree of peace of mind. It is also worth mentioning that she holds a professional degree and has worked in the public education system for five years, perhaps adding to her claim of personal security should her school be closed. To be sure, this expression of confidence was rare; at the time of my conversation with Lourdes, a sense of anxiety and grief among public education workers was rampant (Agencia EFE, 2018b). While this apprehension was absolutely real and justified (school workers’ rights were being routinely violated), Lourdes claims her fears rest more on the disruption of the school community and the jeopardizing of adults and students’ wellbeing. As a mental health professional, she is especially sensitive to the way her school is critically tied to the social and emotional needs of her students and peers, and it is this awareness that incites her to join this political struggle. While some may doubt her statements, her persistent participation in the school encampment campaign is a testament to her words. Lourdes, along with many other teachers at LMR, refused to accept positions in other schools earlier that summer that could have provided them with relative job security and a higher chance of finding decent positions (versus waiting for the end of summer, when there were far less vacancies). Instead, Lourdes and her peers held on to their convictions and sacrificed their summer vacation to fight for their convictions and the welfare of the school community.

Luis, Michael, Cassandra, and Lourdes all demonstrate a critical awareness of their role in a web of social relationships embedded in a public school. They understand the complex and symbiotic relationship between members of the school community, but also between them and the school campus as an integral space in a community. As such, their political actions are not purely motivated by obtaining educational or labor rights, but about caring for one another and fighting for what is best for the entire community, even if it is a sacrificial journey. When the Luis Muñoz Rivera teaching staff was relocated to a receiving school, for example, one of the male teachers with most seniority gave up his right to a position and opted for co-teaching so that one of his colleagues could take up the position instead and not have to relocate to a different school. Such political philosophy subverts not only classic liberal conceptions of the subject and individual rights, but also neoliberal values of competition and self-serving individualism. School personnel like Lourdes and Cassandra have evaded the worker estrangement so common in an educational setting under a capitalist system (Cleaver, 2006).[59] Their holistic engagement with their students and refusal to abide by market logics have allowed them to stay in touch with their professional practice, their co-workers, and the students and families they serve. Both students and staff understand that as members of a school they are part of a whole, and that their political struggle is thus for the collective wellbeing of a school community. As they articulate, their desire to fight for justice is not necessarily grounded on a violation of their personal rights as afforded by the law, but by what is dictated by their morals and sense of solidarity. While

[59] In his essay, "On Schoolwork and the Struggle Against It," Harry Cleaver summarizes the Marxist concept of estrangement as it pertains to the teaching profession. He lists four types of alienation: "the alienation of workers from their work, the alienation of worker from worker, the alienation of worker from their product and the alienation of workers from their 'species- being'" (2006, p. 4)

Keleher's discourse suggests that opponents to her agenda are simply egotistical, Lourdes and Cassandra prove otherwise. Moreover, although the state has left school community members outside of the decision-making processes that affect them, these individuals – young and old alike-- demonstrate to be well-informed about their particular context and a commitment to serve a collective good rather than secure individual gains.

* * *

Cosas que no se hablan

[redacted] la cierran, rotundamente la cierran.
Te tienes que mover [redacted] atropellante.
Tristeza total con esos niños
Era una escuela muy buena.
Los niños se dispersaron.

Una lucha.
Hubo firmas,
los padres…
todo lo que se hace

En mayo, [redacted] cierre de esa segunda escuela.
[redacted] mudar todo.
No sabes para donde vas.

[redacted] es una falta de respeto
para los estudiantes [redacted] es nuevo para mi también [redacted]
[redacted] llegó la carta, cierran
[redacted] no hay suficientes vacancias.
Maestros decidieron mudarse porque no había suficiente matrícula.
El DE dice [redacted] Pero si tu restas y sumas, ves que hay maestros que están buscando plazas pero

te tienes que mover

ahora entras por internet,
nunca había sido así.
todo muy abrupto
hay errores [redacted] maestros de ciencia que salen como maestros de artes visuales [redacted]
[redacted]

muy abrupto,
el maestro [redacted] como [redacted] títere que se le está moviendo

Toa Alta [redacted] cerraron casi todas las escuelas elementales [redacted]
[redacted] ”no hay plaza para ti, no quiero artes visuales”
[redacted] hay tanta matricula
[redacted] no hay una calidad educativa [redacted] sobrepoblada

dicen [redacted] que el maestro tiene 2 meses libres [redacted]

yo compro materiales cuando niños no tienen material de mi bolsillo algo que te nace Tu quieres ese niño No son 2-3 nenes 170 niños por día yo preparaba niños y padres que pudieran certificarse como artesanos 10 años trabajando diariamente voluntariamente de 3-7p… nunca te pagan. preparé muchas personas

Yo decidí irme "retiro voluntario" una expresión que surgió como yo ya no puedo más… no puedo estar saltando muchos ya lo llenaron personas que solo les falta un año para retirarse

es bien doloroso.

mi salón es mi segundo hogar
cierran la escuela, se queda allí el material

son cosas que no se hablan

* * *

D. The Campamento as a Womanist Political Project.

i. Grassroots concientización and autonomous leadership development. For many of its participants, the campamento provided an avenue for *concientización* (consciousness raising) (Freire, 2000) and political leadership development. Although participants like Marta had taken part in political actions all of her professional life, while other individuals were seasoned activists who occasionally visited the campamento to show solidarity, most participants were new to leading a grassroots political fight against a state apparatus. For many campamento organizers, the announcement of their school's closure and the violent means by which policies were being implemented resulted in a type of rude awakening to the current political reality. Laura, a union representative, explained it as follows during her visit to the LMR campamento:

> Laura: Muchos pueblanos, muchos compañeros ahora es que despertaron, porque nosotros llevamos diciéndoles 'esto es lo que va pasar,' los que tenemos tiempo en la lucha, 'esto es lo que viene...' Pero como eso esta como el cuento del lobo, ¿entiende? Como que no creían, o se creían que uno estaba—o ellos tenían sus razones. Pero ahora es que vienen a ver.
>
> Laura: Many small-town folk, many compañeros are now waking up, because we had been telling them, 'this is what's going to happen,' those who have been in the struggle for a while, 'this is what's coming…' But its like the wolf tale, you know? Like they didn't believe it, or they didn't think that one was—they had their reasons. But it is now that they have come to see it.

As an experienced organizer, Laura sees the campamentos as the manifestation of a political awakening that she and other public school organizers were eager to see take form. Lourdes, a member of the personnel at LMR, echoed a similar sense of awakening when explaining women's heavy participation in the public sphere and in the campamento. While men had typically occupied positions power, "en estos momentos…las que más hemos luchado somos las mujeres, que hemos despertado

de…esa subjeción o ese miedo de que no podíamos quiza hacer ciertas cosas (in these times…it was women who have fought, it was women who have woken up from that subjection, or maybe that fear that we couldn't do certain things). The fact that Laura locates many of these newly activated advocates outside of major cities is consistent with the mapping of the campamentos (see *Figure 3.2*), which indeed developed away from major decision-making centers and national-level organizing hubs. When it comes to education, major demonstrations tend to take place in San Juan, where all six of the professional public education unions (five teacher unions and one principals union) are located, as well as the DEPR's headquarters and the main government offices. This is not to dismiss the political history of rural Puerto Rico that continues to this day, nor to equate the periphery and rural areas with a lack of political consciousness. Rather, this geographical dynamic is significant in demonstrating the highly grassroots, autonomous nature of the campamento, for they were not initiated nor centrally coordinated by any external entity. In this way, campamentos appear to be an expression of small, yet powerful collective political awakening of women and their commitment to action.

As several of us sat under the canopy of the campamento one day, Lourdes reflected aloud on the group's fight and the personal, empowering transformation she experienced through that process.

> Lourdes: Y te digo que he aprendido mucho porque esto ha sacado de mí cosas que yo pensaba que quizá yo no era capaz de hacer, y ha desarrollado en mí ese otro lado que yo quizá-- porque yo siempre he sido atrevida a hacer cosas ["con tu miedito, con tu miedito"] exacto-- no así a este extremo. Yo siempre he sido bien cautelosa y trato de entender a todo el mundo, y soy bien comprensiva...pero ya esto-- de verdad que esto ha sido una cosa que-- tu te quedas como que…
>
> Lourdes: And I tell you that I have learned a lot because this has brought out things in me that I thought perhaps I was not able to do, and it has developed in me that other side that perhaps I—because I've always been daring to do things

> ["with a little fear, with a little fear"] exactly—not to this extreme. I have always been very cautious and I try to understand everyone, I'm very understanding…but now this—this is truly something that—you're just left like…

Lourdes directly credits the struggle to save her school as the reason she has been able to become aware of her potential and get in touch with a "side" of her that she had not nurtured. It is evident that her testimony, although embedded in a larger political, highlights a highly personal journey, a path of self-discovery that tests her own assumed limits. Having to confront "this," for which she has no words, propels her to put aside the cautious and patient nature and explore other approaches. Lourdes then narrates what seems to be the beginning of her "transformación," a part of her origin story of a politicized self.

> Lourdes: La missy llegó, entró a la escuela..."les quiero decir que ya no soy su directora." Y yo,"¿Qué? A nosotros no nos han dicho nada."
> "Hoy eso fué-- me citaron para moverme." Y yo, "No esto no puede ser. No lo puedo creer...No…No no no…¿Cómo va ser?" Yo empecé a decir, "Missy, ¡Oriéntese! ¡A usted le están violentando sus derechos también! ["allí empezo la transformación" ((chuckles))] ¿Cómo va ser eso posible? No no eso no puede ser."[60]

> Lourdes: The miss arrived, entered the school…"I want to tell you that I am no longer your principal…And me, "What? They haven't told us anything."
> "That happened today—they called me to move me." And me, "No, this can't be. I can't believe it…No…No no no…How can that be?" And I started saying, "Missy, get informed! They are violating your rights too! ["that's when the tranformation began" ((chuckles))] How can that be? No no that can't be."

Lourdes seems to locates a shift in her self-described sweet and relaxed demeanor as a result of witnessing what is to her a clear injustice (the sudden removal of her school's principal). Though she is initially in shock, she quickly assumes an unapologetic defense of what is righteous, which compels her to try to politicize her own employer. It is here

[60] This quote has been minimally edited for reading comprehension purposes.

that her fellow campamento participant playfully points at the moment of her "transformation," for which evidence abounds. Lourdes became one of the individuals who helped organize her campamento, and consistently showed up to occupy the space and attend related actions, often bringing along her young daughter. I witnessed her speaking confidently at a townhall meeting at the campamento and to the media during an action. She was especially joyous at the campamento one particular day as she triumphantly told the story of how she and her LMR colleagues had shown up to the DEPR offices to pick up the materials for the start of the school year. This, despite the fact that LMR was not supposed to be a campus in operation. In a bold move, the campamento activists had fooled the DEPR into providing them with learning materials, and Lourdes revelled in it. By the time the summer was over, Lourdes had intentionally un-enrolled from the more politically moderate teacher union (Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico), and became a member of what is considered a militant teachers union in Puerto Rico (Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico).

Irene, a mother from the campamento at LRA, also saw herself almost inevitably pushed into social justice activism to defend her daughter's school. Below is an excerpt from a media interview that I had the opportunity to presence:

> Irene: Yo había oído de los cierres pero la lógica me decía esta no la pueden cerrar porque es la única que tiene el prescolar en Toa Baja […]
> Y llegó el día, llegó la noticia.
> Tengo que decir que mi vida personal se ha trastocado…Porque yo era de las mamas que veía por televisión las huelgas, las marchas, y yo misma decía, '¿esta gente no tiene nada que hacer?'...Jamás en mi vida me había pensado, imaginado, que yo iba estar en esta lucha. Pero cuando algo es tan injusto, cuando te tocan un hijo, aquí—se convierte uno en una fiera.
>
> Irene: I had heard about the closings but logic told me that this one couldn't be closed because it is the only one that has preschool in Toa Baja […]
> And the day came, the news came.

> I have to say that my personal life has been disrupted…Because I was one of those mothers who saw strikes and marches on tv, and I would say, 'do these people not have anything better to do?'…Never in my life did I think, imagine, that I would be in this struggle. But when something is so unjust, when they touch your child, here—you turn into a beast.

Much like Lourdes, it is the inability to turn a blind side to injustice that motivates Irene to take part "en esta lucha" (in this struggle). Her perception of activism indicates a distancing that may be both ideological (she does not find demonstrations to be a worthy time investment) and physical (she sees political activism on TV, rather than in her own environment). Her testimony echoes Laura's commentary about the location of these campamentos (in small towns), and the way many school community members had seen signs of the disaster that had ensued (massive school closures) but perhaps did not realize its extent. In this case, Irene logically concludes that her school cannot close as it is an essential resource in her city, only to realize this fact is made irrelevant. Understandably, Irene feels the government has wronged her school community so vilely that she is personally affected, and transforms into a "fiera" (animal or beast) in defense of her child and what is just. While I unfortunately did not have a chance to learn more about Irene's life, there was no better testament to the turn her life had taken than to bear witness to her participation in a radio show. Irene, after only a few weeks of experience as a community organizer, found herself in a studio delivering a powerful and moving testimony in national radio, giving voice to her school community and other fellow special education parents.

These women's personal initiation stories into community organizing provide a window into the motivations and mobilization processes that may have occurred in the creation of campamentos, which touched the personal lives of numerous working class

women across Borikén. To be sure, several campamento participants had already acted as leaders in their communities; many of them were members of their local school council, for example. However, for many, this was their initiation into a struggle with an explicit political framework. Their desire to lead a struggle against school closures was neither irrational nor capricious, as Secretary Keleher suggested (see chapter 2), but the only recourse to correct a blatant injustice. As women who had not had opportunities to engage in political action and develop their advocacy skills, the campamentos were an accessible and safe space for women to explore their abilities and channel their frustration into meaningful social action. It is obvious that whether the various campamentos succeeded or not in keeping their respective school campuses, its participants had tapped into an internal, transformative source of power and a renewed, critical understanding of the world around them.

ii. Horizontalism. Several authors, especially in feminist studies, have written about the patterns of horizontalism rather than hierarchical organizational structures exhibited in women-led collectives (Boggs, 2012; H. Brown, 1992; Mora, 2017; Taft, 2010). This type of organization and terms of engagement (between equals) gives way to the sharing of power and participative models of democracy, effectively disrupting the patriarchal white supremacist structure, as well as the dominant capitalist hierarchical organization motivated by efficiency and production (Radner, 1992). In the case of both women-majority campamentos at Escuela Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano (LRA) and the Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera (LMR), this horizontal character held true. While the most consistent participants tended to coordinate efforts, the campamento did not have any particular organization nor did the the participants hold any titles. In the LMR

campamento, there were seasoned teachers, some professional staff, there were also several mothers, and a couple of children were the usual participants, which were often joined by many others who trickled in and out. In conversations at the campamentos, people shared stories, news, rumors about what might happen to their school and political happenings, told jokes, among other speech acts. Everyone spoke with each other respectfully and casually, and who did what tended to be based on who was present at a given moment. Important matters were discussed as they came up (such as choosing a course of action), and at times were communicated via phone or text with other participants who were not present at a given time. As someone who entered these spaces as a perceived "knowledge extractor," it was interesting to note that I never experienced any of the participants implicitly refusing the title of being a holder of knowledge. That is, in the campamento, I was never directed to speak to someone who was deemed more important or knowledgeable, nor did anyone recuse herself from speaking to me because they felt ignorant, inarticulate, or even uninteresting (which is something I have encountered as a field researcher in other settings, in Puerto Rico and elsewhere).

These patterns contrasted the more hierarchical organizational structures I witnessed during my fieldwork even within the pro-public education, anti-education reform movement. I noticed this while visiting the heardquarters of one of the public school professional union, for example. I walked into their offices and encountered the secretary at the front desk, an attentive and quiet, middle-aged, light-skinned woman. Just as I was about to introduce myself, the president of the organization, a mature man, came to greet me and motioned that we could walk towards the next room, without taking the time to introduce me to the secretary. This instantly felt dismissive and belittling towards

the secretary, and I paused to greet and introduce myself to her before we advanced to the conference room. As I was taking a seat, my interviewee (the organization's president) asked me if I wanted something to drink, which I soon realized was due to the fact that he was about to ask the secretary for a coffee. Being the second instance of a highly gendered dynamic where a woman was being made to be part of the background while I and my interlocutor were the main actors, I felt very uncomfortable. I was glad I declined on having a drink so that the secretary would not have had to "serve" me. Such fixed roles based on organizational hierarchies, which are often gendered, were not something I observed in the campamento. The food and drinks that people brought to share, for instance, was usually left for participants to take as needed. Although I did twice witness one of the campamento mothers encouraging people to help themselves to something to eat, she was not tasked with procuring food, nor did she serve anyone. Her gesture seemed one of motherly concern (she "forced" one of the teacher's daughters to eat) and politeness (she made me aware of food being available as I arrived one afternoon). Similarly, when the the day came to an end and it was time to fold chairs, clean up, and take down the canopy, all the campamento participants participated in the process.

The extent of this horizontalism was made apparent in media and public speaking opportunities, especially in contrast with observations made in the field in other spaces and events. Who would speak to the media depended more on who was present and available to speak, as well as their extent of their involvement with the encampment (a profile that also included some children). This pattern was in stark contrast to what I witnessed in other spaces/demonstrations, where I was directed to a knowledgeable leader to whom "[I] should talk," or where an individual had been designated as a

spokesperson. This had important implications in the context of Puerto Rico's public education advocacy, as males are overrepresented in leadership positions, such as union leadership, DEPR administrative and political positions, and individual school administration. In this way, while women make up the overwhelming majority among those contribute their labor to ensure student success, their voices are underrepresented in the media and public debates. At a small protest in front of the DEPR headquarters to defend fine and performing arts programs and their teachers, I was repeatedly advised to speak to a particular man in the group when I approached some of the teachers protesting. This took place despite the fact that I was asking casual questions and the women and female youth present outnumbered males 17 to 5. Not surprisingly, the three media outlets present that day featured mostly male perspectives. On the other hand, when members of LMR decided to stage a protest to demand to speak with Julia Keleher, mothers, female school personnel, and a child were the interviewees—an arguably representative sample of their group. Interestingly, that day, it was one of their male teacher members who stayed in the campamento while the rest of the group traveled to San Juan for their protest, a type of gender role reversal.

Thus while in the school setting there are specific, defined roles and relations of power based on professional titles, these significantly subsided in the campamentos. It is interesting that when I asked the group how did they first decide to organize, nobody mentioned any names and instead said a general and ambiguous, "nosotros." We all simply talked together and decided to set up a campamento, they told me. The brief response I received over the "who" and how the campamento came to was then proceeded by a long and detailed account of *how* news of the school's closing were

communicated and received by the school community—the date, the time of day, the individuals involved, who said what, what transpired after. A collective experiencing of injustice and working collaboratively to save their school was thus brought to the fore, while individual roles and credits were made unimportant.

The horizontal terms of engagement embodied by campamento participants critically challenge a hierarchical organizations of power that permeates all spheres of life and that enable systems of oppression to continue in Borikén. From family structures, to economic systems, to forms of government, to corporate management charts, to leadership structures, these configurations have ensured that women of color, especially Afrodescendant women, remain excluded from decision-making power[61] yet exploited for their labor to sustain the status quo. The campamento provided a leveling of power that was otherwise rare. In the campamento, I did not witness an allocation power according to participants' class, educational attainment, professional titles, racial background, age, gender expression, experience as activists, or abilities. As a small-scale political endeavor, the campamento's size was a strength, allowing direct democracy modalities to surface organically, making it a highly inclusive and welcoming space. While talents may have surfaced and deployed, the *right* to speak and act was not conceded, the form of political participation was not delegated. The ability to actively participate in a campamento was inherent to anyone who simply showed up.

iii. Mothering and sisterhood. The campamentos displayed a pattern of mothering that made political participation accessible for the working class women in

[61] To this day, only one woman has ever served as Puerto Rico's governor. Out of 49 state representatives, only seven are women; out of 30 state senators, only seven are women. The vast majority of these female elected officials are light in complexion.

school communities, while also proposing a radical vision of organizing. Maparyan identifies mothering as one of the elements in womanism, whereby individuals "love, care, nurture, teach, listen, guide, problem solve, share, and inspire" in an attempt to facilitate others' wellbeing (2012, p 62-63).

I repeatedly witnessed mothering in the form of alloparenting during my fieldwork. Alloparenting is anthropological concept that refers to the care of others' offspring, which in the campamento manifested in offering to take a friend's child to eat lunch, bringing food to share with all encampment participants, verbally checking on young people and guests whether they had eaten or not, ensuring other people's children were not in dangerous situations, correcting behavior, playing with other people's children, and ensuring people made it home safely. In one occasion, for example, as several of us were gathered under the tent of the encampment, a car drove and stopped in front of us to pick up one of the youth in the group, the daughter of a teacher (Marta) who was not present at the moment. The youth, in her late teens, waved good bye and as she was climbing into the car, one of the mothers in the encampment, Brenda, half-playfully asked her whether her mother knew where she was going. The youth assented, and Brenda smiled giving her the ok. In another instance, as one teacher, her young daughter, and two of the teacher's friends sat in the campamento, the young girl mentioned that she felt hungry. Minutes later, the girl and the teacher's friend were out having lunch at a nearby fast food restaurant, while the rest of us continued the occupation. A willingness to engage children, care for them, and being mindful of the needs of caregivers is part of what made campamentos a welcoming, inclusive space for members in the community who are invested in the civic affairs of their schools, but who are de facto

excluded from exercising their power. Considering that in Borikén 59% of children live in a single-parent household (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017, p. 43), and federally administered forms of economic support have lead to the "breakup of extended families" (Safa, 2010, p. 73), the normalization of children's participation in campamentos and women's willingness to step in to mother other's children created an inclusive, welcoming political space for school communities. It is largely thanks to this ethos that children were a defining element of the campamento and other efforts to keep schools open: they created posters, were key participants in protests, gave interviews, chanted and even led chants, and their items were part of the campamento structure. While the vast majority of working class public school children and their caregivers were not attending important meetings with elected officials, sitting in conference rooms where decisions were being made, or participating in marches in San Juan, the campamento offered a structure and culture where they felt comfortable and could feel they had a role to play.

But such carework was not limited to children and mothers, nor were they the only beneficiaries. Women's alloparenting often overlapped with the caring of full-grown adults, particularly women; it was full-blown sister solidarity. For a young woman doing field research alone among other women who were mostly older than me, the alloparenting-sisterhood pattern was something I became aware of very early in my field experience, and for which I was grateful. I list below some of a handful of experiences I had with this theme and later explore what Berry, Chávez Argüelles, Cordis, Ihmoud, and Velásquez Estrada term a "fugitive anthropology," whereby

researchers engage in "recentering our physical, mental, and spiritual bodies in our methodological and epistemological toolkits" (2017, p. 540).

a) When I volunteered to stay at a campamento by myself in the middle of the day until my ride arrived, the three women there immediately rejected my idea: "¿cómo?" "¡no te vamos a dejar sola!" ("what?" "we're not going to leave you here alone!")
b) Night had fallen and we were wrapping up the townhall. It was almost 8pm. I had to make it to the Cataño port by 8:30p so I could catch the last ferry that would take me to San Juan, where I could then catch a bus. One of the male teachers who was involved in the campamento made small talk with me and the fact that I had to make my way to Cataño comes up. The conversation ended shortly after.
c) My Uber arrives, it's nighttime. Just as I am getting settled in the car, I suddenly see one of the women from the campamento –whom I had met that day—at my driver's window. He lowers his window and she tells him to please take good care of me and ensure that I make it to my destination.
d) At the end of a day at a campamento, Lourdes (one of the school's workers) gave me a ride to nearby shopping center on her way home. A friend was supposed to meet me there and pick me up. It was about 5p. When we arrived at the parking lot, I tell her I can see my friend's car, and I thanked her for the ride as I got off the car. I spent the afternoon with my friend and as we had dinner, around 8p, I got a call from an unknown number. It was Lourdes. She called to make sure I had indeed met up with my friend. She apologized for not having reached me earlier, but she had to first find out the contact of the woman who connected me to their campamento, who could then give her my contact information.

Although there is arguably a general sense of friendliness and courtesy that I experienced in my engagement with collaborators, I am confident that the patterns above are not about a mere performance but about a knowledge and solidarity that stems from moving through the world as a woman. While Lourdes's giving me a ride to the mall (example d) can be seen as a polite gesture, her going to great lengths to get a hold of my phone number to confirm I was safe made it clear that this was not about superficial niceties but systems of sisterly care and solidarity. By the same token, women whom I had just met and whom I may never see again, went out of the way to keep me company to ensure my wellbeing (a). As someone who revels in her

independence and makes great efforts to keep fears of sexual violence at bay in order to live her life more fully, the extent to which women's gestures of caution (examples a, c, d) took place initially felt overprotective for me even while I really appreciated them and found them politically significant. When, during my fieldwork, the story of María Trinidad Matus's murder broke,[62] I became even more appreciative of the safety net that my collaborators were constantly building and in which they were trying to include me. Still, I feel my privilege as a light skinned mestiza woman who has enjoyed relatively more safety than the vast majority of women of color in the world had inhibited me from fully understanding why and how these women's preventive measures were, in fact, necessary and effective. When one of the women I met at a campamento spoke to my Uber driver (c), for example, I found it very sweet but I did not understand how that action could increase my safety. Months later, after coming across endless headlines of Puerto Rican women and girls who were missing, killed at the hands of partners, found dead, burned in their own homes, raped, and sexually assaulted in their schools, I began to see how many Puerto Rican women had to rely on each other to prevent gender violence and bring crimes to justice.[63] The meaning behind that woman's brief conversation with my Uber driver began to make sense: it was a "she's not alone," an "I know what you look like," a "we are watching you."

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[62] On August 5, 2018, 25 year-old María Trinidad Matus was killed in a robbery attempt while walking on a Costa Rican beach. María was an emerging musician from Mexico who days before her death had shared that "después de mucho tiempo de haber deseado [ir] por el planeta a viajar sola" (after desiring for so long to travel the world alone), she would be traveling to Costa Rica (Redacción Animal Político, 2018).

[63] The newspaper El Nuevo Día reported in 2019 that the Puerto Rican Police does not have a database for documenting and tracking cases of missing people (Caro González, 2019). In 2011 social worker and activist Carmen Costelló began tracking cases of missing and murdered women and youth, in an attempt to ensure follow up and bring cases to justice (Santiago Torres, 2019)

The carework stemming from a sensitivity to women's experiences as sexualized bodies and as caregivers is instrumental to an analysis of pro-public education political organizing in Puerto Rico. The case in which my less-than-ideal nighttime journey did not elicit any questions or actions on behalf of my male collaborator (b) gives insight into the value of a political project that is informed by a working class women-majority experience. Certainly, it was not any of my collaborators' obligation to secure transportation for me, and it could well be the case that he simply did not think of offering or inquiring about how I would make my way home (considering it would take slightly over an hour of public transportation). However, therein lies the awareness and praxis that emerges from a body that is routinely targeted in a misogynist, racist, classist society. Whereas nightfall and long distances instantly prompted questions about my safety and transportation methods from the women I engaged with, this was not a point of concern for my male collaborator (surely, a very nice man and committed campamento participant). In this case and the many times where participants did not engage in the care of children and youth (but had the opportunity to do so), there was either a lacuna of awareness and/or a rationalization for inaction. Being mindful of needs and making the choice to help fulfill them are both important in a womanist praxis.

It must be clarified that I am not making an argument for a biological motherly instinct that Puerto Rican women inherently possess; people assigned female at birth do not innately desire to got out of their way to protect others and have the knowledge on how to best go about it. They require a critical awareness and intentional action. The lived experiences of my female collaborators having to routinely protect themselves from

gender violence, exacerbated in the aftermath of hurricane Maria,[64] resulted in their being much more aware of particular dangerous situations. In Puerto Rico, race has been shown to add an additional layer of oppression in the form of state violence (Departamento de Justicia de los Estados Unidos: División de Derechos Civiles, 2011; Figuero Cancel, 2018a), and legal status has proven to make immigrant Dominican women particularly vulnerable to gender violence (de los Milagros, 2019). Similarly, as workers and working class mothers, they understood what it means to forego activities that cannot accommodate children, to be unable to afford childcare, to be made to feel like a nuisance for bringing your children to a space, to feel stretched thin as a sole caregiver with little support. Such understanding and empathy prompted campamento women to perform acts of solidarity in the form of gender-informed altruism. To be sure, a children-, mother-, women-friendly space does not naturally happen; it is created. The cooperative care work model that such a space necessitates is laborious. Caring for other's children entails mental labor, inconvenience, energy, expenses, time investments, and emotional work, among others. It is not "natural" nor exclusive to women. Mothering entails the "very things that an actual biological mother does with her child or children to facilitate well-being and optimal development" but "can be done by people of any sex, gender, or sexual orientation with people biologically related to them or not (or even nonhuman beings) on behalf of individuals, specific groups, all humanity, or all creation" (2012, p. 62-63). Through mothering and sisterhood, the campamento radically challenged the exclusion

[64] Though there are no studies yet reflecting the ways gender violence has exacerbated in the Island following Hurricane María, service organizations have expressed an uptick in these type of reports due to the pronounced vulnerability Puerto Rican women have faced. Factors include lack of housing and employment opportunities, disrupted social and legal services, and destabilization of support systems (Bauzá, 2017; Caro González, 2018).

they had suffered at the hands of the state in the crafting and implementation of educational reform and school closures. What's more, the campamento became an example for other defenders of public education by embodying a radical care and inclusion of long-excluded members of school community: working class children and their caregivers.

iv. Thinking-feeling-acting through the heart. Through a combination of testimonios (testimonies), affective labor, and the use of humor, the campamento was a site of healing against a background of violence, dispossession, and commodification. "Thinking-acting-feeling through the heart," helps us understand the culture that emerged and allowed participants to be in touch with their pain but also release that suffering to create joy collectively; a powerful antidote to the competition, commodification, and dehumanizing processes experienced by school communities. First coined by Juan López Intzín (2013), "pensarlo desde el corazón" comes from the maya tseltal tradition, in which the heart plays a preeminent role. López Intzín holds that the centering of the heart (O'tan) in maya-tseltal is an "other rationality," or alternative logic and epistemology to that of the dominant Western tradition (p.74). Mariana Mora (2017) explains the concept of thinking-acting-feeling through the heart in the context of a Zapatista festival, where Zapatistas hosted with great honors the families of the 43 Ayotzinapa disappeared and offered them 43 embraces. She states:

> [These] highlight that the political exists in apparently mundane acts and in expressions of affect as thinking-feeling-acting through the heart. The act of embracing the families was the culmination of an enactment of solidarity that exists only with the understanding that radical social transformation is possible when you are able to touch the pain of the other and to allow their pain to resonate with that of your own people so that the shared encounter can convert collective trauma into something else. (p. 240)

Through this lens, we can better highlight the ways in which people in campamentos demonstrate sensitivity and solidarity towards their fellow community members in an economic and political reality that discouraged such acts by forcing competition and self-centered survival against a background of imposed scarcity. These forms of dialogue and affective work were what Mora identifies as "small acts" that "[insist] upon the dignity and humanity" of encampment participants, "in direct opposition to their neglect and humiliation by government authorities"[65] (Mora, 2017, p. 239). Through their embodied political action, individuals reaffirmed their humanity via the sociability of the campamento.

The open, informal, and flexible nature of the campamento lend itself to honest and spontaneous sharing among participants, who frequently used the campamento as a forum for venting, voicing concerns, narrating experiences, relaying information, and receiving or providing support. The testimonio tradition has been a popular form of communication among women's movements, and have been found to "offer a space to synthesize persona, lived histories and to ground claims to certain subject positions within appeals to popular discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, and class" (Latina Feminist Group as qtd. in Stephen, 2013, p. 160). In what was an incredibly stressful period for school communities, especially teachers and parents, the campamento was a space where they could feel heard, understood, and validated. The excerpt below centers on Raquel's testimony, a teacher from the campamento at LRA who had just been been relocated to a new

[65] Although Mora here speaks of the way Zapatistas welcomed their guests, the families of the Ayotzinapa disappeared, her description is fitting in capturing the dynamics in the encampment and their restorative power.

school. She shares her experience after returning from her second visit to her new worksite. While examples like these abound, this exchange highlights the significance of both testimonio content as well as its dynamics.

((two women apologetically say good bye and that they'll return later))

Lourdes: No, ¡Está bien, gracias! Yo que estoy que si me dejan, me acuesto a dormir, porque me siento horrible…
Laura: Pero hoy ha sido un día de liberar todas nuestras angustias [Raquel: muy bien] [Lourdes: yo me siento fatal] Ella dijo de su escuela, de la escuela que cerraron [Raquel: exactamente] es que ha sido bien fuerte…
Raquel: Es que ha sido [Laura: atropellante] atropellante en todo momento
Brenda: Por más que uno trate de buscar justificación, y no la hay
Raquel: Y vamos a la otra moneda, en la escuela receptora nada de lo que dijeron que había [es cierto] es cierto
Brenda: No, y con los compañeros que te ven…así ((glances condescendingly))
Raquel: Mira, ya hoy ellos estaban como así
Lourdes: ¡Y se supone que no es así!
((overlapping comments, unintelligible. Raquel touches on her new school))
Raquel: …yo llevo 21 años en la misma escuela y yo AMO esa escuela (inaudible) estoy aquí porque no me queda más remedio porque me ubicaron aquí...Pero yo no quiero estar aquí. Yo quiero estar en mi escuela, pero no tengo alternativas, entonces yo estoy afectada igual que ustedes [Brenda: ¡Está claro!] y allí, ellos bajaron, 'no, maestra pero cógelo con calma--' Nooo, porque yo me siento [Lourdes: ¡Exacto! Es la misma...o peor] que yo tuve que llegar a tomarme una pastilla y me acosté, porque era como un...y no dormí. Y hoy dije, bueno, Señor, yo lo pongo en tus manos [exacto] porque un maestro estaba medio molesto y hoy estaba bien. Que se lleve todo como, como que es culpa mía y allí [bajó]...pero…no es fácil…

((two women apologetically say good bye and that they'll return later))

Lourdes: No, it's fine, thank you! I'm in a state of, if you let me, I will lie down and sleep, because I feel horrible…
Laura: But it's been a day of liberating all our distress [Raquel: well said] [Lourdes: I feel awful] She talked about her school, the school that closed [Raquel: exactly] It's just that it all has been so heavy…
Raquel: It's because it's been [Laura: violating] violating at all times
Brenda: As much as one tries to find justification, there isn't one
Raquel: And let's consider the other side of it, at the receiving school none of what they said would be there [is true] is true

Brenda: No, and with the co-workers that look at you like…this ((glances condescendingly))
Raquel: Look, already today they were like this ((grimaces))
Lourdes: And it's not supposed to be like that!
((overlapping comments, unintelligible. Raquel touches on her new school))
Raquel: …I have been at the same school for 21 years and I LOVE that school (inaudible) I'm here because I have no other choice since I was placed here…But I don't want to be here. I want to be at my school, but I have no alternatives, so I am just as affected as you all are [Brenda: Of course!] and there, they calmed down, 'no, teacher, but take it easy--' Nooo, because I feel [Lourdes: Exactly! The same…or worse] that I had to come home to take a pill and lie down, because that was all like…and I couldn't sleep. And today I said, well, Lord, I leave it in your hands [exactly] because one of the teachers was kind of upset and today he's better. May He take everything away, as if I was to blame, and there [he calmed down]…but…it's not easy…

It is clear that for Raquel, her time in the campamento has been, as Laura appropriately calls it, a moment of "liberating distress." At this point of her summer, Raquel has been through so many hardships in professional, emotional, mental, spiritual, and even physical aspects: she has had to say good bye to the place where she worked for 21 years; her longstanding school community relationships had been displaced; she had sacrificed part of her summer vacation to a campamento that did not achieve its goal; her dignity and years of experience as a professional had been trampled on; she was having to spend time and money into making her new classroom habitable (it was unprepared and had no air conditioning); and she was being made to feel unwelcome by her new colleagues, who did not at all empathize with her experience. That Raquel had mustered the energy to show up to her new worksite days before her official start date was truly remarkable and a testament to her resiliency and commitment to her vocation, for it was obvious she had been seriously suffering for months now. But it was "not easy." Her body was manifesting

the physical symptoms of all that stress and Raquel references a combination of medication and prayer to help her cope for the time being.

Campamento participants frequently talked about the pain and indignation they experienced in the midst of a process they overwhelmingly described as "atropellante" (violating). In fact, "atropellante" was the key word I heard the most through out my fieldwork; school communities felt wronged, excluded, dismissed, violated, disparaged. While teachers dealt with the anxiety of not knowing where they would work next or whether their rights actually afforded them protections for a stable future,[66] caregivers stressed over figuring out a way to get their student to a distant school (in the case of school closures) or worried if their school could be next to close (if it was left open). Children, especially students with disabilities, also demonstrated anxiety and pain over learning their school would close, and stressed over having to start anew in an unfamiliar setting. It was a time of uncertainty, tension, and vulnerability for school communities, many of whom were still mourning deaths, dealing with losses, and healing the trauma of a hurricane that had forever marked their lives.[67] Not surprisingly, Lourdes feels miserable to be

[66] One of my interviewees with 21 years as a public school visual arts teacher, had experienced two school closures within the same school year. Feeling tired of the constant instability and devaluing of her work as a visual arts educator, she decided to leave the DEPR in 2018 under the "transición voluntaria" program. Transición voluntaria offered to pay public school educators up to a year salary if they resigned and transitioned into the private sector.

[67] The impact of this natural disaster on Puerto Rican people have led experts to term "the Maria generation" to refer to this population-wide traumatic experience. To illustrate, a recent report by the Instituto de la Juventud demonstrated that 23% of children "exhibit different behaviors" after Hurricane Maria, including difficulty focusing, lower grades, and lack of interest in studies within the school setting, while anxiety, fear, and sadness are some of the most observed behavioral changes in the home setting (Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud, 2018). At the same time, Puerto Rican anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla has described the situation of most Boricuas as experiencing a "double trauma," arguing that the suffering brought by María was placed atop a rampant institutional neglect and economic violence (Torres Gotay, 2018).

experiencing a cold while at the same time enduring the present situation at her school; Laura acknowledges that everything has been so emotionally draining ("bien fuerte"); and Brenda deems it all "atropellante" ("violating").

Raquel thus described one of the many horror stories that had become common among educators under the Keleher administration. Just as "atropellante" was the word most frequently used to characterize the school closure process, "incertidumbre" (uncertainty) and "ansiedad" (anxiety) had become the main descriptors of school community members' emotional state. Unfortunately, the mood was but the beginning of what has been found to accompany neoliberal education reform models. Though privatization school models with "flexible" and contract-based positions are promoted as offering more options and freedom, they instead have proved to deliver precarious employment, increased competition, higher workloads, limited work benefits, and instability (Jabbar et al., 2018; Montaño, 2016; Puiggrós, 1999). I caught a glimpse of the chaos that now permeated the DEPR when I visited one of its regional offices on what was supposed to be the first work day of the school year for teachers. Rather than showing up to their assigned schools and begin preparation for the school year, thousands of teachers found themselves at these type of offices hoping to finally get a job offer that matched their qualifications with a reasonable commute (or sometimes, any job offer). I observed people waiting in lines along hallways, some passing by hurriedly while others looked around as if unsure what to do, some spoke with frustration with DEPR administrative staff. One group was obviously well-aware of what they could expect and sat in lawn chairs that they had brought themselves. At one point, a man passed by me and handed me his

business card, something he was doing with all the people he came across. The DEPR had become so well-known for violating teachers' rights that this lawyer was promoting his education law business inside the DEPR building itself.

Later, I noticed one woman speaking with frustration to a young DEPR staff member who was obviously not answering her question. I had seen her walk back and forth, and I could tell that her composure now hung by a thread. I spoke to her as she exited the building and she talked to me about her situation. Karla was a single mother of two, one of whom was disabled; she had been a fine and performing arts teacher for 20 years, 18 of those in the public system. This summer, she was suddenly assigned to teach K-3, which she was qualified to teach but had never taught nor was she interested in doing so. Having this been the first time this ever happens, she had accidentally accepted the position online, but was not being allowed to correct the error. She had been bouncing from one DEPR office to another, being told that there was nothing they could do, following instructions from DEPR staff that would turn out to be incorrect, being denied basic seniority rights in the candidacy processes. The bureaucratic mess that ensued due to Karla's accidental click of a button was highly ironic given that Keleher took great pride in bringing the DEPR into the so-called twenty-first century by turning everything into data and moving procedures into the digital sphere. Rather than efficiency and clarity, however, school personnel and caregivers alike (especially grandparents and those living in areas with limited access to technology) felt confused and unable to complete the processes that were once familiar to them.

In trying to troubleshoot her situation with the DEPR, Karla's questions and pleas fell into deaf ears: "No me escuchan, no me escuchan…voy a todas partes" (They don't listen to me, they don't listen to me…I go everywhere). This teacher's educational background, experience, and years of service were made irrelevant in a system solely concerned with cutting teacher spending; in fact, her top-notch profile made her an inconvenience. I imagined the time and transportation expenses this back and forth meant for a single mother like Karla, for the DEPR offices were over a one-hour drive from her Camuy home. "Estoy molestísima, histérica" (I'm extremely upset, histerical), she continued, "nos estan ignorando, nos están violentando los derechos…me están imponiendo y no me ayudan" (they are ignoring us, they are violating our rights…they are imposing on me and they don't help me). I thanked Karla for sharing her story, feeling uncomfortably useless in my position as a researcher and stranger who could not offer her any meaningful words of comfort. I thought about the women at LMR and LRA, and I wished Karla had a campamento to go after such a trying day.

The dynamic surrounding Raquel's testimony highlights just what the campamento offered to working class Puerto Rican women like Karla who were constantly ignored, dismissed, and diverted: a space of acknowledgement, resonance, and validation. This sense of empathy and affirmation was accomplished via attentive listening, assenting words while a speaker shares her story (e.g. "exacto"), the building on a speaker's ideas (lines 6, 7, 13), to even finishing each other's sentences, as demonstrated by the script above. Raquel's plight as a victim of a school closure and consolidation is acknowledged with words like "exacto" (exactly)

as she speaks, and with validations of her feeling hurt by her co-workers (line 21). It is evident that Raquel is being listened to; her story does not fall into a void. Through their loving and politically affirming words, the women remind Raquel that her situation is indeed awful, unjust, emotionally demanding, and that she deserves better. It is striking to see the extent to which the women place themselves in Raquel's shoes in order to communicate their sense of empathy and solidarity. The strongest case of this is Brenda's commentary that one of the worst parts about Raquel's situation is the ill treatment one is sure to receive from "los compañeros" (the co-workers) (lines 10-11). Brenda, one of the mothers in the campamento, is not a public school worker, yet she attunes herself to Raquel's position as an educator to the extent that she speaks from Raquel's experience as displaced worker (i.e. the difference between "the" compañeros versus "your" compañeros). It is significant that though Raquel and Laura each work in different schools and are visiting supporters at LMR, they see each other as allies and sources of support, as sharing in a common struggle. This does not mean that the campamento is a fairytale land of resonance and agreement, but simply that a forum is constructed where grievances can be voiced and a dialogue can take place that would otherwise not occur.

Through this minor yet intentional and important affective work, campamento participants offered each other what they were routinely denied by the state—an acknowledgement of transgression, of their humanity as workers, and a platform to be heard. Due to the campamento's collective character and culture of resonance, Raquel and other participants were able to reframe their individual experience as part of a collective struggle of systematic oppression rather than isolated cases. By

contrast, neoliberal policies that intend to use competition and financial incentives as a driver of innovation and improvement encourage school campuses and workers to see each other as rivals and threats. Privatization thus creates not only situations of crisis but *isolating* crises, where individuals are impeded from recognizing personal experiences as symptoms of larger issues and prevented from addressing issues in a collective manner. In this way, the campamento women engaged in the "radical social transformation" that "is possible when you are able to touch the pain of the other and to allow their pain to resonate with that of your own people so that the shared encounter can convert collective trauma into something else" (Mora 2017, p.240).

It would be reductive to portray the campamento as a space dedicated to grieving and serious political discussions. Part of what made the campamento a healing space was the way individuals did their best to create a light hearted and pleasant experience, transforming the sources of their suffering as material for laughter and joy. Here I explore creative expression, including humor, as part of a feminist sensibility that uses affective labor to enhance a socially just cause and collective wellbeing. Furthermore, I propose that the use of humor and pleasurable action is part of a thinking-feeling-acting through the heart philosophy in that it allows individuals to engage in political action in a holistic way, integrating both the senses, mind, and spirit.

A perfect example of this comical and subversive spirit ensued during my second visit to the LMR campament. Given that I had already met many of the participants, I arrived at the site and was offered a chair. I began to detect a sense of awkwardness and anticipation, as if people were waiting for me to begin interviewing

individuals and take out my recorder. I told them to not mind me, that they could continue their conversations and go about their day as they normally would. “Oh you want us to act normal?” Marta replied. “Okay!” She suddenly burst into call-and-respond chants with the group as I laughed at her joke (i.e. the suggestion that this is how they usually spend their day). “La escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera no se cerrará, y el que no crea que hagá la prueba, no se cerrará” (The Luis Muñoz Rivera school will not close, and if you don’t believe it, try it, it won’t close). The energy of the camp rose as participants clapped and sang, the randomness of the situation causing them to smile. “¡Lucha si! ¡Entrega no!” (Struggle yes! Handing off, no!) The chanting subdued as Marta wrapped up the last chant, only to have Michael, a young boy at the school, call out a variation of it “¡Lucha lucha lucha, sí!” “¡Entrega entrega entrega, no!” (Struggle struggle struggle yes! Handing off handing off handing off, no!). The smiles widened and the clapping continued. It was obvious they had dedicated considerable time to creating and practicing their chants—they were energetic, rhythmic, with messages and variations that I had not heard before. They were written in various posters hanging on the school fence. It was day 34 of the campamento and I was in awe that the group could have the energy and morale to erupt in sudden, cheerful chanting. But perhaps it was the chanting that made a 34-day occupation possible. As the singing eventually seized, Marta explained to the group why she had just initiated that: “Pues ella dijo que podiamos actuar normal” (Well, she said we could act normal). Marta then added that what I had observed was an accurate representation because the group was, in fact, crazy. We all laughed once again.

Although full-on episodes of musical chanting were certainly not a daily event, the effort to make light of what was a less than ideal situation was reoccurring and founded on their political protest. One of the largest signs at the LMR encampment, for example, read "KELEHER SUMMER CAMP 2018," a sarcastic jab at the social unrest she had provoked in what was supposed to be a time to relax, while also commenting on Julia Keleher's U.S. background as a colonial entity (as this was the only sign in English). Keleher seemed to be, in fact, a favorite punch line for jokes. When one of the women at the campamento was feeling under the weather and shared that she likely had an infection, one of the teachers replied that actually, "eso es el Keleher syndrome" (that's the Keleher syndrome). There are multiple layers to her joke: she equates Keleher with a disease; there is a suggestion that the issue was not in this teacher's body, but in the awful environment that had been created for her. Once again, the Anglicization of this so-called disease was not a "cool" factor but something unpleasant and harmful, potentially signaling a foreign, colonial character. During another conversation at the LMR campamento, a teacher described the stress and agony that had transpired ever since the closure of their school was announced. She then added, "eso no se lo deseo ni a Keleher" (I don't wish that even upon Keleher). In this case, the teacher seemingly expressed benevolence in not wishing harm unto Keleher, yet simultaneously implied that Keleher was her worst enemy. There was also the time LRA members began getting ready to head home after a demonstration in San Juan, feeling upset and demoralized that the Secretary had not conceded them a meeting although she was present. Miranda, who was there supporting the LRA delegation, explained that Keleher was

certainly extraordinary because it takes a special kind of person to be able to cause so much grief on Puerto Rican children and families. She elaborated matter-of-factly: If you put Trump and Keleher in charge of dropping the atomic bomb, Trump's hand would shake, but Keleher's wouldn't. In a sort of backhanded compliment of the Secretary, Miranda thus inserted a small opportunity for amusement in what was a discouraging situation.

During a community townhall at LMR, I observed the way one of the campamento teachers skilfully and strategically employed humor to affect her audience in the service of their political agenda. Campamento organizers had expressed to me that they did not know what turnout to expect for this event; the fight had dragged on for too long and many parents had lost hope along the way or simply could not withstand the uncertainty. The main event in the agenda was to have a guest education law attorney guide special education parents in filing formal complaints, which was a last-recourse legal tactic after exhausting other strategies. The organizers also intended to update the wider school community as to the DEPR stance on their school's closure (still unclear), and potentially propose an escalating action. The meeting managed to gather about 65 individuals and 20 children/youth, but after 30 minutes of what turned out to be a legal talk by the guest attorney, people slowly started disengaging and leaving. As the lawyer's speech came to an end, the women of the campamento began taking turns on the microphone. Cassandra took the floor:

> ((A campamento mother mentions that DEPR representatives pass by the school to keep an eye on them))

Cassandra: Porque por aquí pasan. Aquí nosotros tenemos satélites. Yo tengo siempre-- tengo mis dudas que en ese palo de mangó deben de haber cámaras ((audience gives a hearty laugh)). Y todos los días yo me levanto FELIIIZ, me maquillo un poquito, me pongo la gorrita --cambio pa' que no digan que la repito-- y saludo ((audience laughs)) a la cámara ((makes a peace sign towards an invisible camera)). Mira que te veo.
Lo que trato de decir es esto-- siempre trato de tirarles una cosa pa' que usted se sonrian. Pero mire, es duro tostarse al sol aquiii. Y coger unos calores que por eso—estoy enfogonada porque si eso me hubiera ayudado a rebajar…((laughter)) pues entonces yo digo, 'pues valió la pena el esfuerzo' ((audience laughter)) ¡Pero es tostarse al sol y no rebajar una onza!((laughter))
Miren, padres que nos escuchan, se los estoy diciendo, si ustedes no se agitan […] Hacerle ver que los padres de Mameyal no son unos tontos! ["darle frente"]
[…]
¡Vamos a pararnos frente al departamento de educación! A nosotros nos cobija la ley, ¡TENEMOS DERECHO A EXPRESARNOS!

((A campamento mother mentions that DEPR representatives pass by the school to keep an eye on them))
Cassandra: Because they pass by here. Here we have satellites. I always have-- I have my doubts of whether there must be cameras on that mango tree ((audience gives a hearty laugh)). And every day I wake up HAAAPPY, I put on a little make up, I put on a cap –I switch it up so they don't say I repeat it—and I say hello ((makes a peace sign towards an invisible camera)). I see you.
What I'm trying to say is this—I always try to throw something at you all to make you smile. But look, it's rough to be roasting in the sun here. And endure some heat that—I am annoyed because if that would've helped me lose weight… ((laughter)) well then I would say, 'well, the effort was worth it' ((audience laughter)) But it's roasting in the sun and not losing one ounce! ((laughter))
Look, parents who hear us, I'm telling you, if you all don't rise up […] Make her see that the Mameyal parents are not dummies! ["confront her"]
[…]
We are going to stand in front of the department of education! We are protected by the law, WE HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPRESS OURSELVES!

Here, Cassandra is nothing short of a talented stand up comedian with a cause. Her willingness to go great lengths to bring up the spirit of her school community and her skillfulness at it, is arguably affective labor in its highest, most subversive form. Cassandra makes a comedic intervention in what was starting to feel like a

fruitless event that would fail to re-mobilize the wider school community: the lawyer had not actually facilitated a complaint-writing process; the energy of the group was low; some people had left the meeting. Through jokes about DEPR surveillance and futile attempts at weight loss, Cassandra makes her audience re-connect with the meeting by drawing reactions from them (both in laughter and commentary). Her jokes are thus an entry point to agitate her community (parents must "rise up") and make an appeal for more individuals to take direct action (by participating in the campamento an an upcoming demonstration). Although performative, her humor is not disingenuous but an opportunity for her to be vulnerable and humanize her struggle; it is founded on the acknowledgement that the occupation is extremely demanding and that she needs more support.

Reactions to the numerous instances described above ranged from smirks to laughter, to the contribution of commentary in agreement. What is marked in this pattern of humor is the premise of pain or unpleasant feelings—having to spend their vacation in an occupation, explaining the grief brought by a school closure, experiencing an illness, seeing that your efforts failed to produce results, disengagement and fatigue at a meeting. Employing humor immediately after these comments or emotions becomes a type of spiritual and emotional first-aid, enabling smiles, laughter, and a shift in energy among campamento members, including the speaker herself. The fact that these jokes are subversive in nature and fall squarely within the campamento's political critique ensures that these "feel good" reactions do

not become numbing distractions or worse, counteractive to their goals and values.[68] As such, these women, highly attuned to their group, use affect as forms of "internal" and "external humor" (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014): creating harmony, emotional release, pleasure, and cohesion among their group on the one hand, and using these speech acts to frame their political fight and make incisive social critique.

[68] For a study on how humor as affect may be deployed in service of an oppressive economic system, for example, see Graefer's "The work of humour in affective capitalism: A case study of celebrity gossip blogs" (2016).

* * *

"La lucha"

Es levantarse a las 5:30
Para llegar a las 6
Con silla en mano
Y quedarse
Hasta las 5

La lucha es pasar las vacaciones
Bajo una lona de plástico,
En el calor tropical del verano
Mientras a 10 minutos
Las olas refrescan a bañistas.

La lucha es
Cinco mujeres
Turnándose a ser madres
"no te vayas a la calle"
de los nenes
en el barrio
"¿tienes hambre?"
"no pongas eso en la boca"
y de las nenas
de 16
"¿quieres agua?"
también.

La lucha es
Hacer colecta
$10 más
Para las compras
$10 menos
de mi bolsillo
2 cajas más
de bocadillos

La lucha es
El ciclo
De bajar las sillas en la escuela
Subir las sillas en casa
Subir las sillas en la escuela
Bajar las sillas en casa…
Sin que ningún medio
Publique las fotos.

La lucha es
Cómo ahora mami sale en las noticias
Cómo mi maestra es nuestra abogada
Cómo la missy es vocera también
Cómo la teacher es maestra de ceremonias
Cómo la terapeuta es analista política
Cómo a mi escuela la conoce toda maestra
Cómo mi vecindario lo conoce todo Puerto Rico.

La lucha es
Saber los síntomas de la compañera
Y al día siguiente
Enterarse de los resultados.
Saber de la operación
De la sobrina,
Darle palabras de consuelo,
Y después
Recibir noticias.
La lucha es
Venir a sentarte en el piso
A la hora más caliente del día
Para hacerle compañía a tu amiga
Sin tener hijos aquí
Sin trabajar aquí,
Prefiriendo
La sobriedad
De la solidaridad.

La lucha es
Comprar, coordinar,
Organizar, preparar,
Para nuevamente empezar.
Lo más común
De comunidad.

Día a día
La lucha es
La lucha es
Cada día.

* * *

E. The Campamento as Platform for Mamás Pleiteras de Educación Especial.

Through the campamento and related actions, advocates underscored and resisted the harmful impact that school closures and privatization models threatened to inflict on special education students. It is no coincidence that many of the people organizing on the ground (via school campamentos and other grassroots efforts) were mothers of special education students or personnel who worked directly with this student group, for this group of activists was especially sensitive to the risks they saw on the horizon. According to data for the 2014-2015 school year, about one out of every three K-12 students (31.4% or 144,034 students) in the Puerto Rican public school system is classified under the special education program,[69] versus one out of ten students (10.9% or 15,828 students) in the private sector (Disdier & Jara, 2017). To put this into perspective, about one out of three (or 35%) of all K-12 students in Puerto Rico attends a private school (2017). Thus we see that economically disadvantaged, disabled children and youth are at the core of the Puerto Rican public school. Through the encampment and other forms of organizing, special education advocates and special education students themselves were able to bring attention to the plight of special education students in the wake of neoliberal policies.

While the DEPR as an institution has a long history of rights violations and failure to adequately service its special education population (Díaz Vázquez, 2015), many parents spoke out in defense of their current school communities, which had provided nurturing and supportive learning environments for their special education children amidst systemic failings. These particular activists' testimonies were key in voicing the

[69] For the same school year, in continental U.S., about 12.9% of students in the public school system had disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

perceived threats entailed by school consolidations and privatization, which in turn informed the public about the reality of the situation and alerted special education students' parents. At the same time, their stories highlighted the invaluable system of support they already had at their respective schools and the urgent need to protect them.

I was able to witness a testimony from a mother of a special education student, who shared her experience during a "special assembly," which took place at the LMR campamento on the evening of July 31, 2018. LMR campamento participants had called the meeting to update the community about an inconclusive letter they received from Julia Keleher in response to their petition to meet with her, to present information on a new strategy to prevent their school consolidation (filing formal complaints of special education students' rights violations), and to exhort community members to support the encampment and continue "making noise." Towards the end of the meeting, Cassandra took the floor to ask for more community support, and which prompted the following response from Esther, a mother of an LMR special education student.

> Esther: Yo no soy de Mameyal. Yo soy de Bayamón. Mi hijo, viene con un expediente, una maestra de kínder me bloqueó mentalmente a mi hijo— que se orinaba y vomitaba todos los días antes de entrar al salón. Un niño de 5 años que no quiere saber que es una escuela, ¿ok? Y esta señora que esta aquí fue la que le quitó los miedos, A MI HIJO, EN 2 SEMANAS en el campamento que tuvo aquí. ((community claps, Cassandra is visibly moved.)) Sin conocerla me brindó la ayuda. ((community claps.)) Sin conocer esta señora me abrió las puertas de la confianza y me dijo, "yo acepto el reto, dame tu nene en este campamento." Se lo traje el segundo día porque el lunes mi hijo entro en pánico, porque no quería. Niño de 5 años que le da pánico las escuelas. EN MENOS DE 5 MINUTOS mi hijo hizo 'click' con esta dama. Mi hijo gozó sus 2 semanas de campamento. Mi hijo AMA esta escuela, mi hijo AMA a esta señora, ¿cómo yo le voy a decir que no la va volver a ver? ["eso" "eso es asi"] A MI, LISA KELEHER NO ME VA COMER LOS DULCES. ["Julia"] A MI, LISA KELEHER ME VA ESCUCHAR. RICKY ROSSELLÓ ME VA ESCUCHAR. A MI, LA MUJER DE RICKY ROSSELLÓ ME VA ESCUCHAR. ["¡también!"] ¿POR QUÉ? PORQUE YO SOY MAMA PLEITERA DESDE MI NENE SEGUNDO

> (community claps) [“tienen que ser los padres”]. Porque para el departamento de educación yo soy un buco [“¡a-ha!”], soy la pesadilla [“¡a-ha!”].
>
> Esther: I’m not from Mameyal. I am from Bayamón. My son, he comes with a record, a kindergarten teacher blocked my son mentally— that he peed on himself and vomited every day before entering a classroom. A five year old child who does not want to know what a school is, ok? And this woman that is here was the person who took away his fears, MY SON, IN TWO WEEKS in the summer camp that they had here. ((community claps. Cassandra is visibly moved.)) Without knowing her she offered me support. ((community claps.)) Without knowing this woman she opened the doors of trust to me and told me, “I accept the challenge, leave your child with me in this summer camp.” I brought him the second day because on Monday, my son panicked, because he didn’t want to go. A five year old child who is panicked by schools. IN LESS THAN 5 MINUTES my son went “click” with this lady. My son enjoyed his two weeks of camp. My son LOVES this school, my son LOVES this woman, how am I supposed to tell him that he’ll never see her again? [“right” “that’s how it is”] LISA KELEHER WILL NOT EAT MY CANDY. [“Julia”] LISA KELEHER WILL LISTEN TO ME. RICKY ROSSELLÓ WILL LISTEN TO ME. RICKY ROSSELLÓ’S WIFE WILL LISTEN TO ME. [“her too!”] WHY? BECAUSE I AM A BELLIGERENT MOM EVER SINCE MY SECOND CHILD (community claps) [“it has to be the parents”]. Because to the Department of Education, I am a billy goat [“uh huh!”], I am a nightmare. [“uh-huh!”]

Through this brief narrative, a number of issues particular to the special education community are made apparent. First, the mother identifies herself as someone from a town outside of the Mameyal neighborhood (where the LMR school is located), which tells us her son does not attend his nearest neighborhood school. This experience is not uncommon for special education students and their parents, who very often face difficulties finding schools in their vicinity that have the appropriate facilities and services for their children and therefore drive longer distances to find adequate schools. Furthermore, we learn that a negative experience at a previous school caused this mother to look for a campus that better served her child, which is also not a singular case. Lastly, her statement of having become a “mamá pleitera” (belligerent mom) “ever since her second child,” speaks to mothers’ need to *adopt* such a persona in order to ensure that

their children with disabilities receive quality educational services. Her ownership of this character, a potentially aggressive and defiant woman, subverts racialized gendered tropes used to silence and police women of color's voices, especially Black women (Ashley, 2014), and which have been deployed by the Secretary of Education herself against her opponents (see chapter 2). Esther's sentiment was echoed in different contexts by other mothers of children with disabilities. In media interviews, one mother said she turned into a *fiera* ("fierce" or "beast") when her child's rights were violated, while another stated the reason her daughter received quality services at her public school was because "she has a mother who is willing to do anything for her rights" (referring to herself). Together, these descriptions speak to a long history of struggle, navigating a complicated system and unapologetically fighting to secure what should be a basic right for their children.

Fortunately, many special education parents like Esther were able to find relief in the care of dedicated teachers and nurturing school communities. For Esther, the immediate establishment of bonds of trust and care among mother, child, and teacher Cassandra implies a much sought-after safe heaven. For the first time since her child began his educational journey, Esther can finally rest from seeing her child suffer from symptoms of trauma and from the ongoing fight to have his needs met. In addition, her school's child has provided him an ability to heal from past trauma and at last fully engage in his learning, providing a solid base for the rest of his educational career. Esther's story demonstrates that for her and her son, Luis Muñoz Rivera is not simply an educational institution; it is a space for which they have searched and whose personnel inspire trust, peace of mind, and hope for a child's future. As evidenced by the audience's

enthusiastic clapping, assenting commentary, and utmost attention, the people engaged in the fight to save LMR deeply empathized with Esther's powerful testimony, for they too held their local teachers in high esteem and understood the challenges of providing your child with a quality education as a low-income parent. In fact, Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera enjoyed a reputation in the area for being an excellent institution. Although most students came from the surrounding neighborhood, one of the most active parents leading the campamento, Brenda, would drive from a different neighborhood so her son could attend LMR. Another mother, who participated in the campamento and related actions, shared with me that she did not have her child enrolled at LMR yet, but she fought for the school to remain open because she had heard great things about the school. With such a reputation, the fact that LMR was located in a low-income neighborhood and served "some of the poorest students" (as one of its teachers declared) made this school an invaluable resource for the community. It is easy to see why Esther, along with other special education parents, would refuse to accept an arbitrary closing of her child's school and why she would be ready to confront the highest Puerto Rican officials.

For Irene, a mother of a young special education student attending Escuela Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano (LRA), the drive to keep the school open had similar implications for her and her child. Irene had been participating in the campamento at LRA and spoke at a radio show to share her experience. The following is an excerpt from her testimony:

> Irene: …la Escuela Lorencita significó para mí el que mi hija pudiera hablar. Porque mi niña llegó a esta escuela sin poder hablar. Sin poder demostrar gestos y afecto. Y esperé cinco meses para entrar a esta escuela […] Aquí, el gobierno no tiene ni la más mínima idea del daño que le está haciendo no solamente a los nenes, es todos los que componemos-- porque los padres de educación especial pasamos un calvario para poder tener a esos nenes con unos cuidados adecuados.

> Llegamos al sitio ideal, y no lo cierran […] nuestros nenes pasan por un sinnúmero de pruebas que un niño normal no tienen. Entonces, hay que dar una estructura. Estos niños, cada paso que ellos dan, esto no es solo el esfuerzo de ellos. Es el esfuerzo de un maestro—el maestro se solidariza, el maestro viene a ser parte de tu familia. Y en ese sentido la maestra de mi niña ha sido un ángel en la vida de mi nena. O sea, de mi nena no mostrar gestos de afecto, yo llegaba y encontraba a mi niña (makes embrace gesture) agarradita de la maestra.
>
> Irene: …the Lorencita School meant for me that my daughter could speak. Because my daughter arrived at the school without being able to speak. Without being able to express gestures and affect. And I waited five months to enter this school […] Here, the government does not have the most remote idea of what it is doing to not only the children, but all of us who make up—because the special education parents go through hell in order to have these children with the appropriate care. We come to the ideal place, and they close it on us […] our children go through innumerable challenges that a normal child does not have. So then, you have to provide a structure. These children, each step that they take, is not only their own effort. It is the effort of a teacher—the teacher is in solidarity, the teacher becomes a member of your family. And in that sense, my daughter's teacher has been an angel in my child's life. That is, my daughter went from not showing any affect, to my arriving and finding my daughter (makes embrace gesture) clutching her teacher.

Like Esther, Irene also brings attention to the burdensome journey that special education parents face to simply bring the DEPR to compliance with their child's documented needs. Aside from completing necessary paperwork, parents often have to wait for days, weeks, and even months for their children to have all the necessary components of their individual learning plans met. These unmet needs could range from having teachers or assistant staff assigned, having adequate facilities for therapies, to actually being placed in a school. These issues were acutely exacerbated as a result of school closures and consolidation. In a rural neighborhood in Ponce, for example, the closure of Escuela Elemental Anselmo Rivera Matos in 2017 left many students without speech or psychological therapy services, and with no means to arrive at their receiving school though the parents had been offered transportation (Estrada Torres, 2017). The

start of the 2018 school year was equally chaotic; leading organizations representing the functional diversity community to denounce that about a thousand students were without schools or without access to appropriate service (Agencia EFE, 2018d). While these reports were scant in mainstream media, they were rampant in social media, where parents commented and asked questions on teacher union and the DEPR social media accounts, desperately trying to find solutions to their particular situation. Parent activists involved in the campamentos were instrumental in bringing these concerns to the limelight to create awareness and incite people to take action.

In Irene's particular case, having no other pre-K program in her municipality, she had to wait five months before the local government addressed an administrative issue so that her daughter could at last begin classes. Despite a rocky start, her experience turns positive on multiple levels: not only is her child finally able to access the services to which she is entitled, but her daughter is able to socially and emotionally flourish, and acquires unprecedented verbal abilities. The empathetic professional support and dedication that has made these changes possible has created strong bonds of collaboration between Irene and her child's teacher, whom she now regards as family and as an angelical presence in their lives. Moreover, these familial ties with school personnel and the emphasis Irene places on the interconnected nature of a special education student's team (including the parents, teachers, support staff, and the student herself), once again demonstrates the domino effect that takes place when one aspect of this social structure is disturbed or removed. In short, Irene speaks to the violence that school consolidations and school closures entail when there is no sensitivity nor a centering of human lives. Later in the interview, for example, she explains that special education students require

specific, fundamental learning environments, such as contained classrooms or low pupil-to-teacher ratios, all of which were seriously threatened in the wake of a reckless education reform implementation. Special education advocates like Irene were key in warning about issues of *hacinamiento*, or overwcrowding, that came with school consolidations, which was especially harmful to special education students[70] (although all students suffer when they are not given appropriate facilities and support). As Irene illustrates, to a special education child, moving to a new environment is a monumental challenge; to remove a special education student from her beloved teacher is abusive; to open the possibility of a special education student losing days of instruction or supportive services is callously negligent; to take away opportunities that are already difficult to secure is criminal.

Shorly after Irene's testimony, two young mothers at the radio segment spoke of their experience as mothers of special education children at Escuela Ana Roque de Duprey in the central-east side of the San Juan municipality. Tatiana is a mother of an autistic child, while Sara's daughter has multiple disabilities; they both had been actively demanding answers from the DEPR as to why their school was chosen to close. The Escuela Ana Roque de Duprey, they shared, was a natural disaster refuge, their special education facilities had been remodeled four years prior, had three full-time special education classrooms, classrooms for therapy sessions, and their library was recognized as a historic landmark. Tatiana and Sara, like the vast majority of parents whose testimonies I heard, expressed their frustration and grief over an uncertain future for their

[70] Their concerns were well-founded and, unfortunately, materialized as soon as the school year began. A few days into the semester, photos circulated in social media showing former LRA students having class in portable, rented classrooms at their receiving school due to lack of adequate space.

children. Their testimony underscores how much higher the stakes are for their children with disabilities, who were especially vulnerable in the face of sudden change and lack of a sustained support system in a new environment.

> Tatiana: es triste porque ahora mismo, mi hijo, (voice breaks) yo no le había dicho…que su escuela cerraba. Cuando yo se lo dije, mi hijo lloró. Mi hijo es de autismo, el salón a tiempo completo. Al yo decirle eso a él, que se iva a salir de su escuela, que ha estado desde kínder, que el puede ser victima de bullying en otro lado….eso es lo que—lo más miedo que a mi me da. Que mi hijo es un niño amoroso, que todo mundo lo conoce, y nuestra escuela…es diferente porque—
> Sara: No hay bullying. No hay diferencia entre niños de (makes quotation marks sign with hands) corriente regular y educación especial.
> Tatiana: Así mismito.
>
> Tatiana: It's sad because just now, my son, (voice breaks) I hadn't told him…that his school was closing. When I told him, my son cried. My son is autistic, full-time classroom. When I tell him that, that he was going to leave his school, where he had been since kindergarten, that he could be a victim of bullying somewhere else…That what—it's my biggest fear. My son is a loving child, everybody knows him, and our school…it's different—
> Sara: There's no bullying. There's no difference between children of (makes quotation marks sign with hands) regular classrooms and special education.
> Tatiana: That's exactly right.

These mothers bring attention to the often overlooked value of friendships and meaningful relationships built among children. Tatiana's concern over bullying is, regretfully, a common experience among parents of children and youth with disabilities. Despite scant research exploring the connection between bullying and children with disabilities, studies have found that this social group is "two to three times more likely to be the victims of bullying than their nondisabled peers" (Marshall, Kendall, Banks, & S. Gover, 2009, p. 221). The campus climate that these mothers have identified as a protective factor, with peers who acknowledge their children and do not discriminate against them on the basis of their abilities, has also been found significant by experts in the field. Research by Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig, demonstrated that a peer-led

intervention in a case of bullying is effective in 57% of cases (2001). According to the PACER Center,[71] while adult advocates may be a victim's number one resource to address bullying, peer intervention may be effective because peers are "more likely than adults to see what is happening with their peers," and peer-to-peer influence is often more "powerful" than adult-to-child advice (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, n.d.a). Tatiana and Sara are sensitive and knowledgeable about what are the optimal learning conditions for their children, which require not only adequate facilities and qualified staff, but also social spheres that will procure their safety ("he could be a victim of bullying *somewhere else*") and affirm their humanity ("there's no difference between children"). As mothers of vulnerable students, they recognize how strong bonds among children in a school community are in fact both a preventive factor and an effective intervention when it comes to bullying.

The case of Tatiana and her son demonstrates that the school closure and consolidation process has resulted in disproportionate hardship for the most vulnerable youth and their families—not only in terms of physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities, but also in terms of social and economic disadvantage. In her interview, Tatiana mentions that in the case of an incident or emergency, her son's attending a more distant school would present increased barriers for Tatiana's ability to help him. After explaining that the next closest school campus is over a 30 minute walk, she asks: "Si a mi hijo, le hacen un bullying, o le hacen algo, ¿yo como voy a llegar hasta acá?" (If somebody bullies my son, or does something to him, how am I supposed to get all the

[71] The PACER Center was founded in 1997 by parents and families of youth and children with disabilities, eventually growing to support this target population at a national level. In 2006 they launched the PACER National Bullying Prevention Center, focusing on preventing childhood bullying (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, n.d.b).

way over there?). Hence we see how Tatiana's concerns and her son's vulnerability are exacerbated by her condition as a working class mother; she feels defenseless because she does not have a reliable vehicle (and likely, the money) to go from place to place as she pleases. While her fear resides on the possibility of experiencing violence due to her son's disability, it could easily translate to issues of safety faced by other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ youth, and racial minorities. One of my interviewees, Miranda, a mother of a special education youth and long-time disability rights organizer, highlighted that there is often a strong connection between poverty and families in the disabled community. She stated that about 80% of disabled students come from low-income families, often because of a thin or nonexistent safety net. Many mothers find themselves obligated to quit their jobs, she says; "de alguna manera [ser madre de una estudiante de educación especial] te lleva a la pobreza" (In one way or another, [being a parent to a special education student] leads you to poverty).

Thus the time and energy required for a caregiver to support a disabled child results in more precarious economic conditions, while economic limitations may in turn reduce a parent's ability to access safe and quality schooling for their children. In her interview, for example, Irene pointed to her daughter's school being selected for closing despite having suitable facilities for their special education student population and being the only campus in the entire municipality to have a head start program. While a middle- or upper-class parents dissatisfied with their children's school may opt for enrolling them in a school farther away from home or even move residences as a family, working-class parents do not have such an option. Tatiana and Sara's emphasis on their school being special ("it's different," "there's no bullying"), elaboration on its adequate facilities and

services, and their obvious commitment to fight for its survival, is proof that this institution is an extraordinary resource for working-class parents who may otherwise face overwhelming circumstances.

The network of support that a low-income parents can find in their child's public school makes a tremendous difference in not only their students' education but their own quality of life as a caregiver. Miranda shared with me some of the least spoken-about but serious difficulties that parents of children with disabilities face. At the same time that Miranda's daughter, who is a youth with down syndrome, is her absolute pride and joy, she also spoke frankly about how her life transformed when she became a mother. One of these challenges, she said, is the social isolation that caregivers face as friends and relatives may distance themselves or relationships become estranged. "Muchas famlias se alejan…pierdes tus parejas, tus familiares" (Some families become distant…you lose your partners, your relatives), Miranda told me as the two of us had lunch after a demonstration. A 2017 study on social isolation and informal caregivers,[72] which included subjects who cared for a disabled son/daughter, found that caregivers frequently experience loneliness in the form of "diminished social interaction," "relational deprivations and losses," social interactions that felt "distant," as well as a sense of "powerlessness, helplessness," and "sole responsibility" (Vasileiou et al., 2017). In some cases, caregivers of disabled children may no longer have the time or resources to engage in the activities they enjoyed. Miranda, for example, had dreamt of becoming a filmmaker as a college student, but it is an idea that does not seem to fit into her current lifestyle-- "hace *años* que no voy al cine" (I haven't been to the theater in years) she tells

[72] As opposed to professional or paid caregivers.

me. For single mothers like Miranda, who bear the responsibility of being their child's main caregiver and find themselves also being full-time disability rights advocates, having a trusted and sympathetic support system in their school communities is truly invaluable. While this dynamic has a positive impact on students, research has found that feeling connected to a social network of support has direct effects on caregivers' own health. A study of informal caregivers in Colombia demonstrated that social support significantly reduced caregiver depression and anxiety, enhanced sense of satisfaction with life, and moderately decreased feelings of burden (Morlett-Paredes et al., 2014). Hence, at the same time that students and parents or caregivers may not find the support they need in their immediate or extended families, they may gain new "family members" as a result of their shared experience. Just as Irene talks about her daughter's teacher as a member of her family, Miranda echoes on the meaningful relationships she has forged as a mother and advocate: "mi familia es la comunidad con quien yo peleo" (My family is the community with whom I struggle).

These mothers' experiences, knowledge, and their willingness to fight for their schools refuted a premise in the state's line of argumentation that justified closing school campuses: that these were expendable, "failing schools" and that the process of school consolidation was done in a "rational" manner. The testimony and activism of *mamás pleiteras* underscored the developmental growth, care, and student success that, given the appropriate infrastructure and resources, was able to flourish in public schools across Puerto Rico. These public schools prove to be valuable community spaces that provided the human talent and facilities that were both essential and not always accessible to working class families, making impact in students and caregivers alike. At the same time,

these mothers' testimony exposed the DEPR's gross irresponsibility and exclusionary decision-making processes, while highlighting their profound understanding of their children's educational needs and valid apprehensions as *mamás pleiteras*. In addition, their critique of the public education leadership and the concerns they raised for students' futures provided a window of insight for other vulnerable members of the school community, such as low-income families or students who face different forms of oppression.

It is evident that Puerto Rican working-class disabled students deserve and need school contexts that allow them to create, maintain, and fortify the bonds of collaboration between school personnel, caregivers, and students. For the *mamás pleiteras* here featured, school closings, undemocratic and exclusionary decision-making, and insensitive school consolidations/reorganizations, has only meant the disruption and violent severing of these relationships. These shifts have caused much suffering and anxiety in student and caregivers' lives, in addition to the ongoing challenges of moving through a society that privileges the able-bodied and a public education system that routinely fails to honor the rights granted to this community. While the system of public education in Puerto Rico prior to the Keleher-Rosselló leadership was admittedly deficient, school closures and the threat of school privatization disturbed and undermined the very elements that were indeed contributing to special education student success and wellbeing.

* * *

Atabey y María

[redacted] el magisterio [redacted] gran población femenina. Y [redacted] mujeres solas que crían su niños. [redacted] maestras solas que tienen que llevar el sustento a los hogares [redacted] más preocupante. [redacted] las mujeres estamos al poder, estamos activas [redacted] Este movimiento, esta era, [redacted] mucho de nuestra Pachamama [redacted] la energía femenina [redacted] Atabey nuestra madre tierra taína. [redacted] mujeres que saben todas las leyes, que vamos a luchar, y se van a los portones [redacted] educar, hay que educar [redacted] a mis niños, yo los llevo [redacted] tienen que entender. [redacted] yo les hablaba de todo [redacted] defender tus derechos [redacted] ser seres pensantes, seres críticos, [redacted] se tiende a aplastar todo eso

María [redacted] vino a destapar lo que estaba oculto [redacted] vino a sacara a la luz todo.

* * *

F. The Campamento as Anti-Colonial Cultural Affirmation Front. The campamento proved to be a political strategy to protect what was conceived as a Puerto Rican cultural site in the face of neocolonial invasion. This cultural defense is made obvious in the very image of Puerto Rican public schools as they stand today and what they might become should the neoliberalization of education continue in Borikén. For this to be made clear, it is necessary to revisit and trace the changes that public school facilities have endured in the past one hundred plus years. As discussed in Chapter 1, the construction or conditioning of over a thousand buildings to serve as public schools was part of a massive U.S. imperialist Americanization project during the first half of the twentieth century (Negrón de Montilla, 1977), which upheld U.S. cultural values and an Anglo-Saxon patriarchal white supremacist political order. The ongoing contestation and contributions from local educators (del Moral, 2013b, 2013a), however, combined with increased Puerto Rican political autonomy starting in the late 1940's, allowed public schools to slowly reflect local needs and ideals. While the well-documented "language issue" is perhaps the epitome of the cultural battleground that has transpired in the Puerto Rican public education system (Epstein, 1970; López Laguerre, 1998; Reyes Benítez, 2000), other examples of Puerto Rican sociocultural assertion in public education has not received as much attention.

Perhaps the most physical representation of the Puertoricanization of the public school system is imprinted in school buildings themselves. Although the U.S. government erected school buildings with the names of U.S. Presidents, U.S. founding fathers, and Eurodescendants, the names of many public schools soon became a living monument to historical figures that have particular significance to the Puerto Rican

people. Though there is scant data on school naming dates and subsequent name changes, the case of a school in Carolina could be seen as an embodiment of the process of reclamation of public schools by the Puerto Rican nation. The "Columbus Rural School" officially opened in Carolina in 1902 as the first U.S.-built rural school, for the purpose of serving as a "practical school of agriculture" (López Borrero, 2005, p. 129). However, by the 1960's this school had now become Escuela Julio Vizcarrondo, named after prominent abolitionist, humanitarian, and revolutionary leader who helped draft the Moret Law (which paved the way for complete abolition in the Spanish empire) and who constantly advocated for Puerto Rico's political autonomy. The significance of the ideals behind the two historical figures is profound: Columbus, representing white settler-colonialism, racism, and genocide, versus Vizcarrondo as a symbol of human virtue, liberty, equality, and democracy. The location and purpose of this school also bears important racial implications. At one level, the dominion of the agricultural industry is part of what initially motivated a U.S. invasion of Borikén and the creation of a low-wage laboring class (C. J. Ayala, 1999); at another level, Carolina as a coastal geographical space holds historic ties with the sugar industry and afrodescendiente populations (Ortiz García, 2006, p. 57). Alongside the school's name change, there is an important shift in vision: from a building modestly constructed for the explicit purpose of forming colonial subject-laborers, to a more prominent student-centered educational institution that tends to a variety academic, developmental, and cultural needs.

Despite the limitations of the historical record available does not allow such a thorough discussion for other schools, there are other cases that evidence the [re]naming school buildings as a Puerto Rican claiming of public education. Another school in

Carolina, for example, went from "Escuela Jardines de Country Club" to "Escuela de la Comunidad María López Ponce" (Pérez, 2016). Moreover, of all the 15+ schools that held campamentos or whose school community members are here cited, only one of them bears the name of a U.S.-born historical figure (Escuela John F. Kennedy in Toa Baja). While these designations range from lesser-known figures who simply found themselves in positions of power, others are key historical icons in Puerto Rican history who embodied admirable values. Such is the case of Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera, which honors the life of one of the most well-known relentless advocates of Puerto Rican autonomy both under Spanish and U.S. regimes. The Escuela Ana Roqué de Duprey mentioned above, on the other hand, bears the name of writer, educator, scientist, suffragist, and founder of the first feminist organization in Puerto Rico, the "Liga Feminista Puertorriqueña" (Feminist Puerto Rican League) in 1917 (Olguín Arroyo, n.d.). Escuela Segundo Ruiz Belviz in San Juan is named after nineteenth century abolitionist and independence leader by the same name. Notably, several Puerto Ricans of African descent are also paid tribute in public school buildings: Pedro Albizu Campos, famous attorney and leader of independent movement during U.S. occupation; Ramón Emeterio Betances, doctor and "father" of the Puerto Rican independence movement; Rafael Cordero, known as the father of public education;[73] and Julia de Burgos, feminist, educator, independence leader, and poet who gained international recognition. While these historical figures are well known and much has been written about them, there are also many schools that bear names that are not well-known and about whom little has

[73] While Rafael Cordero is a well-known educator, his older sister, Celestina, has received less recognition for having opened the first school serving girls of all racial backgrounds her contributions and for likely having initiated Rafael as an educator (Méndez Panedas, 2019).

been written. In such cases, school buildings become unique entry points to a national historical record that may otherwise be inaccessible.

Based on what has thus far transpired in areas where the mass school closures and charter school expansion have occurred, it would be fair to say that the cultural character of Borikén as manifested in its public school communities, especially its campuses, is under serious threat. Consider the case of Escuela Julia de Burgos in Carolina, which the DEPR ordered to close in 2017. This school was at the center of a major controversy when the media published reports from the Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico that the school building had been transferred to a Christian pastor and megachurch leader, Otoniel Font, for a nominal fee of $1 (Metro Puerto Rico, 2018b). Font's church, Iglesia Fuente de Agua Viva, has opened a private school in the premises, the "Fountain Christian Bilingual School." In addition to the gross corruption and unethical handing of public goods to private entities, there is an obvious washing away of the puertorriqueñidad conveyed by the name and legacy of Julia de Burgos, as well as the type of educational offerings that are now being made available (or denied) to the children in this Carolina neighborhood. This was further confirmed by photos showing a 1966 mural at the school by renowned Puerto Rican artist Antonio Torres Martinó completely painted over as part of the building's repurposing (Agencia INS, 2018). Perhaps not surprisingly, private owners have no regard for the historical integrity of a building nor its cultural significance, and will instead focus on using their property to maximize financial gains, as any other business owner would do.

Other historic buildings with intergenerational ties to communities, have been left abandoned. The Escuela Theodore Roosevelt in Mayagüez that just this 2017

celebrated—with a student and school personnel gathering and special cake-- 117 years of legacy, is today closed and silent. Also in Mayagüez, as if taken from pages of a magical realism book, some schools in disuse have become horse stables or animal corrals, coexisting with abandoned equipment that was never properly inventoried and stored (Jiménez, 2019). Other campuses have simply joined the long list of empty school buildings across continental U.S. that have become targets for drug use, theft, and vandalism, as they wait to be picked up by the highest bidder (Perez Jr., 2017). Whether left neglected or bought by an investor, school closures and charter school models lead to school buildings seizing to be structures that reflect the history and culture of the community that surrounds it. Even when public schools are closed only to be re-opened as so-called public charter schools, these prototypes are often based on a franchise-like model whose core does not reside at individual local communities.[74] School closures or the importing of outside models effectively ends the collective, cumulative reproduction of the local meanings ascribed to spaces of public education.

Another critical instance of the Puertoricanization of public education was the development of policies and specialty schools that aligned with local priorities. The first world-renowned[75] Escuelas Libres de Música (Music Magnet Schools), for instance, were created in 1946 through an act of the Puerto Rican senate led by musician, lawyer, and legislator Ernesto Ramos Antonini for the purpose of developing and channeling the

[74] KIPP, one of the largest charter school operators, currently runs 244 schools across the U.S. Their board, like most charters, is made up of people all over the U.S., from a myriad of industries that are often unrelated to education, and who have not sat foot in all the communities for which they make decisions.
[75] Just this past January, 2019, the Elmera Jazz Ensemble from the Escuela Libre de Música in San Juan won first place at the Berklee Jazz Festival, while 13 year-old Julio Gastón won first place for best performance (Metro Puerto Rico, 2019).

innate artistic sensibility of Puerto Rican people (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2008).[76] The conceiving of Puerto Ricans as a people who are inherently inclined to artistic expression and the creation of an educational project that could cultivate this affinity speaks volumes not only of a Boricua sense of identity, but also of the visionary leap in the public education system's leadership. The ideal of a Puerto Rican educated and skilled young musician is arguably a great departure from the mere formation and regulation of a colonial subject, the ideal student archetype according to U.S. colonial regime leaders. In addition, the Escuelas Especializadas en Bellas Artes (Specialized Fine Arts Schools) offer specialized curriculum that supports the artistic development of public education students in a variety of areas within the fine and performing arts, including traditional Puerto Rican folk arts such as bomba, plena, and mask-making. Today, Escuelas Libres de Música and Escuelas Especializadas en Bellas Artes are found across Puerto Rico and provide access to instruments, mentorship, facilities, and opportunities for artistic development to public school students who would otherwise have limited access to formal artistic instruction. Similarly, the Escuela Especializada en Béisbol Manuel Cruz Maceira (Specialized Baseball School Manuel Cruz Maceira), allowed working class youth from the Comerío community to complete their high school education while also having access to quality athletic facilities and training, which was formerly only available to students attending private institutions (González, 2016).

Many other schools in Puerto Rico have developed programs and partnerships that respond to local needs and that have become sources of pride and cherished resources for school communities. The choir program at Ponce High, for example, has

[76] Original text: "desarrollar y encauzar la innata sensibilidad artística de nuestro pueblo."

been in existence since 1940 (Torres Guzmán, 2018), and it was recently selected to participate at the Festival InCanto competition in Italy. While fine and performing arts educators and students alike continue to call attention to the way the arts contribute to a well-rounded education, cultural development, and student wellbeing, especially the most marginalized sectors (Mercedes Martinez as qtd. in Inter News Services, 2018b), the state has often failed to provide adequate funding and support to these programs. In fact, the past few years has seen an exponential decrease in fine and performing arts educators, from about 2,500 in 2009 to 1,300 in 2015, according to visual arts teacher and activist Carlos Vélez Torres (Figuero Cancel, 2015). One of the protests I witnessed in front of the DEPR headquarters in July 2018 was in defense of fine and performing arts teachers and students, who once again found their art programs threatened when these educators received sudden notifications of reassignments as obscure and inconclusive "proyectos especiales" (special projects).

Other public schools featured smaller-scale but meaningful projects and characteristics; these traits were the elements parents and teachers highlighted in the media when they questioned school closures and defended their campuses. I have discussed above how therapy offerings and facilities that could adequately accommodate special education students, for example, were essential assets in public school campuses, many of which serviced a large population of disabled children and youth. This was true for Escuela Lorencita Ramírez de Arellano, Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera, and Escuela Ana Roqué de Duprey, here featured. In addition, the Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera prided itself in having an excellent library and an environmental awareness program for K-3 students, in partnership with the University of Puerto Rico. Parent campamento

participants at the Escuela Francisco Lugo Rosa in San Sebastián, on the other hand, stressed their school's 7 certified bilingual teachers and athletic facilities as opportunities to capitalize upon, as opposed to sacrifice and waste (Figuero Cancel, 2015). In a similar vein, school community members attesting to their schools being "of excellence" ("de excelencia" or offering quality academic programs) was a phrase I heard repeatedly during my field work and in media pieces featuring anti-school closure protests. This was true of the community group defending the Escuela Olga Colón Torres in Guánica, a school in the southwest coast of the Island. A special, teacher-led initiative was also highlighted in a news piece reporting on the school community protests against their school's closure in 2018.

> David Suriano: Esto ha sido un proyecto especial que yo implanté como maestro hace ya más de diez años. Estos niños se van educando según van pasando de grado en el ambiente musical, en especial en el instrumento del violín. Es un instrumento que es difícil, cuesta tiempo lograr aprenderlo, y estos jóvenes los hemos logrado llevar hasta representar la escuela en Estados Unidos. Es una preocupación bastante grande que nuestra escuela sea cerrada y se pierda estos talentos. (*Padres de Guánica se manifiestan por cierre de la escuela*, 2018)
>
> David Suriano: This has been a special project that I instituted as a teacher over ten years ago. These kids are educated as they advance in grade in the musical field, especially in the violin instrument. It is an instrument that is difficult, it takes time to learn it, and we've been able to take these youth to represent our school in the U.S. It's a major concern that our school is closed and these talents are lost.

A key element in the commentary of music teacher David Suriano is the sustained effort over a long period of time that has been required both to develop the program and to develop student artistic talent. It is a phenomenon that did not and cannot occur overnight. He voices the concern of the school community over the future of students should Escuela Olga Colón Torres close, for they are aware of the fact that such programming is not a common offering at other schools. What's more, the skills and

talents that have been developed will be abruptly terminated and with it, the opportunities and personal fulfillment that may have come with this artistic practice. Sadly, no matter what strengths schools possessed and what sociocultural contributions they made to their communities, hundreds of these promising projects were caught in the net of school closures and thus came to an end. Equally important in this dynamic is the hundreds of designated receiving schools whose academics and supplemental programs decreased in quality as a result of overcrowding and shifts in personnel and/or school organization charts, both direct products of school closures and the education reform.

The devaluing of the humanities, social sciences, and activities with untestable outcomes is symptomatic of the reform education movement and seriously threatens the unique multi-disciplinary projects that have developed out of a Puerto Rican ideal of public education. Although Borikén has made important contributions to the sciences and has been the host of a strong manufacturing industry, I choose to especially focus here on athletic, social studies, and fine and performing arts programs because a) these areas have been proven to be most compromised by neoliberal models of education, especially in low-income communities and communities of color, b) their integration into school curriculum has been positively received by school communities, and c) they are areas in which Puerto Ricans have also excelled and gained international notoriety.[77] So-called reform movements have been notorious for prioritizing "core subjects," such as English and math, while championing STEM/STEAM programs (Judson, 2014; J. H. Spring, 2012), and enforcing standardized test-based accountability models (Au, 2015). While all

[77] To name a few of the highlights in the past year alone: 14 year-old Adriana Díaz ranking as the #1 table tennis player in Latin America, the Puerto Rican delegation taking 17 gold medals at the 2019 Special Olympics World games, and the Las Nietas de Nonó art collective being featured in both the Whitney Biennial and Berlin Biennale.

students should have access to a wealth of academic offerings that nurture their interests, abiding by high-stakes testing has come at the expense of subjects that do not let themselves to standardized testing or fall outside the hegemonic academic canon, such as ethnic studies (Naegele, 2017), fine and performing arts (National Council of Teachers of English, 2014), multicultural content (Au & Gourd, 2013), and even physical activities (Graham et al., 2002; Seymour & Garrison, 2015). It is precisely these pedagogical modalities and curricula that have proven to not only improve racial minority student academic performance, but also contribute to their sense of belonging, identity exploration, cooperation skills, and ability to cope with experiences of racism (C. M. Byrd, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2016; Sleeter, 2011).

Such constraints on student creativity, exploration, critical thinking, and exposure to alternative philosophies is especially harmful to students of color and those of economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Focusing on the experience of Black youth, Damien Sojoyner refers to this educational deprivation as part of an "ideological enclosure" that normalizes controlling, oppressive, prison-like conditions for students that at the same time discards valuable, Black ancestral knowledge and cultural forms (Sojoyner, 2016). Historically-informed, and culturally relevant creative expressions can offer students an opportunity to access a cultural repertoire rooted in "historical struggles that provide both critiques and counter-narratives to dominant ideology" (2016, p. 57). Unfortunately, in their aggressive pursuit of high standardized test scores and lack of administrative understanding of local culture, charters have been notorious for imparting

authoritative and punitive models[78] on the "urban student populations" (i.e. Black and brown students) they tend to target (Hernández, 2019). At a February 2019 town hall organized by the New Orleans-based ERASE the Board Coalition, an parent-led organization seeking to restore community control over local charter schools, former students and community members spoke of the prison-like environment present at the local charter schools. "I only learned to be obedient and compliant…they programmed me to be dependent" (Travis, 2019), a young Black man shared of his experience as a young boy in a New Orleans charter school. He described how a visit to a loved one who was incarcerated brought back memories of his days as a school boy. "Where have I seen this?" he asked himself aloud, and then began describing the way he and his peers were always made to walk in single-file rows in silence, with hands behind their backs. At the same gathering, a Black mother described her thoughts during a visit a at a majority-white charter school:[79] "I saw kids running," "saw kids being kids" (Cowart, 2019). For this mother, the sight of children enjoying the freedom to be playful and joyful at a public elementary school had become a rare occurrence, for it was not the norm in her experience at majority-Black charter elementary schools. Given the bleak results in educational gains that New Orleans Black families have seen in almost 15 years of charter school expansion (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; K. Buras, 2011; K. L. Buras, 2013; Quigley, 2017), it is no wonder that ERASE the Board holds that the charter system is in

[78] Hernández's study of New Orleans disciplinary practices concluded that in the first few years of the post-Katrina school reform, expulsion rate in publicly funded schools increased by a 140-250% rate (2019).
[79] The charter school system has done little to desegregate New Orleans public schools, and in some cases has worsened it. The fact that the best-performing schools continue to serve a disproportionate number of white students while working class Black families do not have access to the schools they prefer is a common complaint among New Orleans parents. A 2010 report by the UCLA Civil Rights Project demonstrated that charter schools across the U.S. "continues to stratify students by race, class and possibly language"(Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010).

fact, an initiative for managing young bodies and minds. Mother and public education activist Ashana Bigard summarizes: "I believe this is an experiment. And it's not an experiment around education because we already know how to do that. It's an experiment around power and control" (Bigard, 2019). The charter school model, directed by elite entities foreign to local school communities and driven by Eurocentric standards and curricula, has proven to be an "ideological enclosure" on racialized children's ability explore their individuality and engage with counterhegemonic content that has shown to empower and uplift historically marginalized students.

Altogether, the education reform in Borikén pushes a de-puertoricanization of its public school system by removing the working-class Puerto Rican community from its role as co-drivers of a national educational project. Nowhere else is this more evident than in the very conception of the school under the new education reform law (Ley 85). The Ley 85 repealed the 1999 "Ley Orgánica" (Ley 149) that formerly gave structure and vision to the public school as an "escuela de la comunidad" (school of the community), designed to give autonomy to school communities through financial, administrative, and curricular decision-making power.[80] As such, all non-magnet public schools were in name and theory schools of the community, with local governing boards made up of school personnel, parents, community members, and even students. The school charter and voucher models were so incongruous with the established vision of public education in Puerto Rico that it was initially found unconstitutional under Puerto Rican law. In an

[80] While the Ley Orgánica was a considerably progressive law in the amount of power it theoretically placed to local school communities, several of the union leaders I spoke to in the field stressed that this power was never fully conceded by the DEPR, which considerably limited the law's ability to effect substantial change. See for example Emilio Nieves Torres' "Escuelas charter o escuelas de la comunidad" (2018).

unusually expedient legal battle, the supreme court removed this roadblock, paving the way for the eventual repeal of the "escuela de la comunidad" model and import of U.S. prototypes like the charter school and voucher system. The education reform law thus struck a blow at the very heart of how schools were meant to manage themselves, taking away workers' and the local community's power from controlling their academic programs, resource allocation, partnerships with outside organizations, and hiring processes, among others. Hence the education reform law *kicked out* the Puerto Rican working class community out of its neighborhood school and removed the seat at the decision-making table. Meanwhile, it opened the possibility for outsiders with no ties to the local community, or even a background in pedagogy, to take over local schools and decide what kind of education Puerto Rican children should obtain.

Conclusion

The campamento embodied and sought to defend the gains made in the struggle to develop a national public education project in Borikén; the *escuelita* that had been nurtured by school communities in spite of the U.S. colonial yoke. In the Puerto Rican public education context, the supremacy of the market and the government-to-governance shift (both features of the neoliberal state) worked to cut public spending, "expedite" government functions, and open the doors to private institutions. As seen in the previous chapter, the Puerto Rican state fully embraced a neocolonial discourse to justify and promote neoliberal education policies that would dismantle the public education system and threatened the very character of the Puerto Rican neighborhood public school. In this paradigm, school community members were forced into narrow particular subjectivities (e.g. obedient workers, non-questioning citizens, self-sacrificing mothers, test-taking

students) and objects (e.g. dehumanized source of labor, investments, data) to be shuffled in the name of the supreme god of economic stability. Nevertheless, through a radical womanist approach to organizing, campamento participants proposed a grassroots, affective, horizontal, anti-individualistic political project that not only worked to keep their prized neighborhood schools open, but also promoted anti-hegemonic forms of collaboration and living in community. The campamento's small scale and highly localized base was its strength, allowing school community members to come together in highlighting what made them and their schools strong, unique, valuable, worthy, and knowledgeable enough to trace their own path. In its small scale and highly localized based, the campamento was the piedrita (little rock) fiercely striking the Puerto Rican Goliath state where it most hurts: its ability to define, control, isolate, and dehumanize the everyday people of Borikén.

Conclusion

What does the fight over neighborhood public schools like Luis Muñoz Rivera or Lorencita Ramirez de Arellano mean in the larger framework of public education, neoliberal reform, and social action? The stories of passionate multigenerational defense of escuelitas here presented underscore the fact that a neighborhood public school, especially in poor neighborhoods, is unquestionably much more than a building with furniture, supplies, and "human capital." These sites are hubs for interaction and relationship-building among neighbors, for the creation and strengthening of systems of support (especially for vulnerable students and families), for the reproduction of culturally informed knowledge and practices, for school workers to enhance their job satisfaction, and for the ability of working class women to exercise their political power over their local schools (and by extension, influence a national educational project). This is not to say that neighborhood public schools are perfect, but that there is evidence that these spaces have proved to serve such purposes, and that the neighborhood-public school dyad is what makes such positive effects possible. Truly, the neighborhood school seizes to exist in school voucher and charter school model when children are suddenly bused across the city to a neighborhood where they are strangers rather neighbors; when neighborhoods no longer have a connection to the public spaces in their area because it is now managed by an outside entity that resides in a different city or state; when staff and teacher turnover rate is so high that relationships among co-workers and members of the school community are ephemeral at best; when kids bounce around from one school to

another every two years or less and lack longstanding bonds of trust with their peers and teachers; when charter schools are closed down every couple of years and re-opened with a completely new set of workers and student body; when a wealthy white businessman in a board has more say over a school's disciplinary code than a parent at that same school.

Thus as seen by the case of Puerto Rico in the past few years, school closures and privatization have devastated and threatened the gains they had fought so hard to secure. These spaces should be strengthened through increased material support to community-controlled public schools and increased political agency afforded to families and school workers. In contrast, a stripping of their assets, decision-making power, and improvements is not only antidemocratic but will always have devastating effects. Despite neocolonial discourses that insist on the intellectual inferiority and political inefficiency of people of color (in this case Puerto Ricans), vis-à-vis the supreme abilities, resources, and morals of Anglo saviors, it is obvious that the people of Borikén understand how their schools function and possess the vision and ability to transform the system of public education according to their vision. What's more, Puerto Ricans, like so many dedicated teachers, social workers, support staff, parents, and students across working-class neighborhoods across the U.S. (K. L. Buras, 2013; Capai, 2019) and the world (Capai, 2019; Pellejero, 2018; Roffo, 2017), possess a deep appreciation for their education as a culturally relevant endeavor, for the institutions that house their educational services, and for the individuals that make up their school communities.

In defending their escuelitas, the campamentos defy the narrow images of who is a political actor (e.g. the politician or leftwing radical activist), who formulates political theories (e.g. the academic), who shapes political discussions (e.g. the media, textbooks),

where political action takes place (e.g. Congress, the court), and what are viable channels of political action (e.g. voting, lobbying). Campamentos present to us everyday mothers, children, grandmothers, and teachers, who, in setting up a tent in front of their neighborhood public school, reclaimed space as a communal treasure; who, in listening to each other's stories of pain and making each other laugh, affirmed their experiences and rejected an imposed subjectivity of expendability; who, in framing their fight, highlighted an ethos of affect and care that subverted neoliberal paradigms of financial savings/gain, worker productivity and efficiency, high-stakes test performance, individualism, and competition. The tenacity and political critique of these mothers, grandmothers, teachers, and even children, can only be adequately appreciated given the historical and discursive context of their condition, which routinely placed their academic modalities and labor at the service of a Spanish elite, then Anglo-U.S. colonial power, and currently, a global political-economic class with an elite Puerto Rican white-majority intermediaries. The small-scale resistance, removed from Puerto Rican political centers, was thus its strength.

As a researcher, including poetry in my methodology opened the door to a much diverse epistemological toolkit and presentation of findings. Much like the women in the campamento allowed their emotions to inform what should be protected and how their fight should be carried out, poetry provided a thinking-feeling entry point for me to explore what was salient, significant, painful, beautiful, and uncomfortable, and how it could be expressed. By making the writing space an area of exploration and even play, I subdued an overly critical expected audience and expressed myself more freely. Moreover, given that the academic essay's body is strictly confined to the thesis it proposes, poetry allowed me to add texture and background to the stories I presented, and

to acknowledge myself as a witness and therefore filter of those stories. In addition, doing found poetry with untempered interview transcripts and field notes allowed me to try other ways of attention to important issues and details. Perhaps even more importantly, poetry allowed me to put into practice the most powerful lesson I took away from witnessing the campamento women's fight: to not allow myself to be confined to a single modality or silence parts of myself simply because that is what best serves an institution/tradition or because it is much more safe.

Indeed, the women in the campamento invite us to not only identify but also talk to each other about the imposed subjectivities that seek to displace our sense of self and people, our calling as workers and social actors, the people and places we care about. We are thus reminded that the fight for public education, much like most social justice struggles, are not about future generation's ability to get a full-time job or power to rule, but about their right to exist according to non-imposing value systems and traditions, in the places they justly call home, with people they love. Racial minorities and poor communities the world over are certainly are not "sillas" (chairs) that the neoliberal world order "pueda mover" (can move) at the whim of the market. The campamento women call us to a higher order of political theorizing and moving through the world, as communities not individual actors, whose ethos is one of care not official rights or obligations, whose worth cannot be captured in charts or balance sheets, whose ongoing, radical political agency cannot be captured in a ballot box once a year.

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Biography

Linett Luna Tovar was born in Zacatecas, México and lived in the San Gabriel Valley, California throughout her youth. She is a proud community college alumnus, where she studied fine and performing arts, and later, creative writing. In 2013 she graduated from the University of California Los Angeles, where she majored in Anthropology and minored in Latin American Studies (largely thanks to the support from other immigrant youth and allies at IDEAS at UCLA). She has dedicated much of her community involvement to youth and immigrant rights advocacy. Her scholarship and art are informed (as in, she is their student) and inspired by her family/relatives, friends and fellow organizers, spiritual practices, radical scholarship and artwork, and young people fighting for justice all over the world.