

COLONIAL SHAME AND ITS EFFECT ON PUERTO RICAN CULTURE

by

ALISON TORRES RAMOS

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Supervising Committee:

Timothy Morris, Supervising Professor

Erin Murrah-Mandrill

Timothy Richardson

ABSTRACT

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Alison Torres Ramos, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington

Supervising Professor: Timothy Morris

I explore how American influence affects Puerto Rican culture through colonial shame. My dissertation is informed by the following questions: (1) In what ways does Puerto Rican culture attempt to move away from colonial shame? (2) What underlying desires and fears are present in Puerto Rican cultural productions? (3) How does colonial shame create agency in the struggle to achieve cultural currency within the wider American society? (4) How does colonial shame affect transculturation between Puerto Rico and the United States?

The second chapter of my dissertation explores Puerto Rican attempts at moving away their colonial shame to subvert it. This is accomplished through the promotion of alternate historical narratives which are not based in fact but function as the ethno-nation's narrative of heroism and rebellion. I specifically analyze the autobiographical works of Jesús Colón and Esmeralda Santiago in terms of their use of food and bodily functions as catalysts for ethno-national defense.

The third chapter of my dissertation examines how colonial shame influences and promotes ethno-national superiority through a rhetorical analysis of the curricular documents published by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico for the English and Spanish programs from 2000-2010. Both languages hold an official status on the island, yet there is a marked tendency for Puerto Ricans to resist bilingualism despite being Enrolled in English classes from K-12. I ultimately found that the seemingly neutral discourse used by both programs were in fact steeped with veiled ideological language and arguments that promote ethno-national superiority.

The fourth chapter of my dissertation takes a close look at the Puerto Rican Syndrome as it appears in the independent film, *An American in Puerto Rico*. One of the effects of colonial shame on Puerto Rican cultural productions is that it gives agency to people who normally would not have a valid voice within a colonized society. *An American in Puerto Rico* explores the role of colonial shame within a colonized culture from the perspective of the colonizer. The Puerto Rican director and production team use the white American character, John, as a way to give agency to the plight of colonized subjects. The film also highlights the problem with naming a syndrome specifically “Puerto Rican.” Arguably, anyone who is confronted with the harsh reality of colonialism could suffer

from a nervous breakdown regardless of whether they are the colonizer or the colonized.

In chapter five, I examine how colonial shame influences the degree to which Puerto Ricans attempt to control, or at least move away from, the dominant colonial discourse by protesting the effects of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions. The object of study for chapter five is the music genre of *reggaetón*. The genre of *reggaetón* had origins in Puerto Rico and enjoyed popularity within the island during its early "underground" years. However, despite the genre remaining relatively popular outside of Puerto Rico, it currently has a negative stigma on the island. I explain that one cause that explains the genre's decline is the lack of popularity was the culture industry's homogenization of the genre which promoted a negative view of Puerto Ricans in the public arena.

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DEDICATION

I would not have made it this far without the love and support of my family. My husband, José E. Nieves Acevedo, believed in me so much that he supported my decision to pursue a Ph.D. even though that meant that we had to leave our beloved Puerto Rico behind. He sacrificed a lot to help me follow my dreams and I am very grateful that we are on this journey together. I appreciate his patience and willingness to brainstorm ideas with me. He has a knack for helping me to see my work through different angles. I would not have made it this far without his love and support. I would like to thank my mother, Maria D. Ramos Marin, for always believing in me. She always made sure that my visits to Puerto Rico were as relaxing as possible. This was much appreciated especially because these visits usually happened between stressful semesters. My time visiting her and Robert recharged my batteries and allowed me to attack my dissertation writing with renewed vigor when I got back to Texas. I also appreciate how she always made a point to understand my research. My siblings, Deylison and Rawlison, and my father, Rawlison Torres Rosario, were also constant sources of encouragement throughout this process. I appreciate how they never failed to support me even during the times when I felt most unsure about myself. I am also indebted to all of my extended family in Puerto Rico and Texas. Our interactions reassured me

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CHAPTER 1: COLONIAL SHAME AND ITS EFFECT ON PUERTO RICAN
CULTURE

*Next year, on March 2, will mark 100 years that we have been
disenfranchised U.S. citizens. One hundred years,
I think it's about time the nation recognizes us.*

—Carlos Ramirez Barcelo¹

*Boricuas have elaborated a discourse of 'positive' images
designed to raise the low symbolic capital associated with
Puerto Ricans as an American ethnonational group*

—Frances Negrón-Muntaner, 25

In Frances Negrón-Muntaner's provocative book, *Boricua Pop*, she examines the cultural influence and contributions of Puerto Ricans to American culture. She pays particular focus to how these exchanges are tied to expressions of bodies and individual body parts and discovers that these varied cultural exchanges had the similarity of being steeped in tropes of shame. Her research made innovative strides in the field of American Studies and created new ways of conceptualizing Puerto Rican transculturation. Her emphasis on different body parts regarding cultural expression, while needed and relevant to current discourses in cultural exchange, left significant gaps within the framework of the Puerto Rican cultural experience. During my investigation, it has become evident that a

deeper exploration of the intricacies of what I call colonial shame is needed within the unique Puerto Rican context.

Puerto Rico is a favorable subject of study within American cultural studies due to its colonial status. It is the oldest continuous colony in the world and differs from the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean because it has the distinctive characteristic of being colonized by the United States for over a century. In a primarily post-colonial world where America is historically viewed as the beacon of liberty and democracy, Puerto Rico has an ironically backward colonial status that is marred by controversy. Puerto Rican culture historically resists assimilation by actively seeking to distinguish itself from the American status quo through rejection of cultural assimilation that manifests itself through a plethora of means. These means include pseudo-nationalistic pride, language policies that favor Spanish over English, and a tendency towards constant cyclical migration that produces a constant flow between Puerto Ricans living on the Island and in the United States. Puerto Rico's wavering political status can be described as neither independent nor fully incorporated as a state. This political ambiguity is evidenced in the contradictory titles of Puerto Rico in English and Spanish; the official title of Puerto Rico in Spanish is the "Estado Libre Asociado" (translated as 'Freely Associated State'²) and in English, it is known as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Over a

century has passed since the American invasion, yet the majority of Puerto Ricans both on the island and on the mainland, retain uneasy ties to the United States, despite having American citizenship since 1917, which granted them the freedom to travel to and from the mainland.

Citizenship's function as an ideological Band-Aid was not enough to cover the glaring incongruences that make up Puerto Rico's legal status.³ A popular example that is used to explain the contradiction is that Puerto Ricans living on the island have the right to vote in presidential primaries, but cannot vote in the official election. Nevertheless, Puerto Ricans who live in the United States (even temporarily) share all the "privileges" of other Americans and can vote in all elections. The historically rocky association between the United States and Puerto Rico, coupled with the peculiar circumstances surrounding its conquest, forever shape the way Puerto Ricans view and interact with the United States.

Puerto Rico has gained increased scrutiny in recent years due to its precarious economic status. In April 2015, various news agencies⁴ reported on the language loophole that allows for Puerto Ricans to benefit from social security because they do not speak English. The Social Security Administration claimed "The guidelines assume individuals who are unable to communicate in English are limited in their ability to find a job in the regional or national economy where English is the predominant

language, even though residents of Puerto Rico may be able to find local work with their Spanish-speaking skills” (1). The report noted that 218 Puerto Ricans were awarded social security benefits because they could not speak English. The report caused a lot of discussions at the time because Puerto Rico is historically perceived as a welfare society and Spanish is the preferred language on the island. The Puerto Rican language policy debate will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but I wanted to bring up the report as an example of how Puerto Rico is debated stateside in recent years.

Another example of Puerto Rico spawning international debate is seen in the conversations that revolve around its political status and its fiscal crisis. In the supreme court ruling of *Puerto Rico vs. Sanchez-Valle (2016)*, the sovereignty of Puerto Rico was determined to originate “with Congress itself, a ruling which reaffirms the so-called ‘Insular Cases.’ It firmly establishes Puerto Rico as an entity dependent on Congress” despite the United States “declaring to the United Nations that Puerto Rico is a self-governing ‘commonwealth’ in 1953” (Newkirk par. 4). The court ruling cemented Puerto Rico’s status as a colony with little to no power to self-govern outside of Congress. The ruling made the news shortly before the passing of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act or PROMESA which calls for the creation of an unelected 17

member Puerto Rico Commission for the Comprehensive Audit of the Public Credit board which has the task of restructuring and managing Puerto Rico's debt. PROMESA further deteriorated Puerto Rico's autonomy by placing their finances in the hands of a few people who are selected by Congress. Alex Figueroa Cancel explains that "The measure imposes a joint federal fiscal control with extraordinary powers over the elected government of the island, with what Congress demanded as the authority that had allegedly been given to Puerto Rico six decades ago to make critical management decisions at the local level" (par. 20).

PROMESA has been met with controversy because the members of the board do not necessarily have to have experience with Puerto Rico, which calls their motives into question. These feelings are further compounded by a section in PROMESA that makes it permissible for the board members to receive gifts, something which could potentially sway their decisions. PROMESA also calls for a binding plebiscite to be held in the future in order to resolve the status issue. The future implementation of PROMESA is unsure because of the recent election of President Donald Trump, but what remains certain is that Puerto Rico and the United States will continue to be a popular topic in each other's public forum for years to come.

Puerto Rico's unique and turbulent context makes it a fertile area for conducting qualitative research grounded in cultural studies methods. My project addresses the lack of studies focused on the teasing out of the effects of colonial shame as represented in Puerto Rican culture as represented in various modes of media culture and spectacles. Colonial shame has been largely unexplored by scholars, but I argue that it is a crucial concept that permeates through much of Puerto Rico's cultural capital. Research in this area is solely limited to Frances Negrón-Muntaner's *Boricua Pop*. Negrón-Muntaner argues that Puerto Rican cultural productions exhibits undertones of shame due to its colonial status. Negrón-Muntaner suggests that Puerto Ricans' attempts to value themselves have "frequently been staged through spectacles to offset shame" and that boricua⁵ identity as we know it would not exist without the "shame" of being Puerto Rican (xiv). One such manifestation of shame is the exaggerated acceptance and elevation of all things Puerto Rican, such as the popularity of Ricky Martin and Marc Anthony and the almost cult-like following of J. Lo's butt. These spectacles are designed to offset the shame of being Puerto Rican by promoting the idea that Puerto Ricans are superior to their colonizers. Negrón-Muntaner maintains that shame is not the product of an individual inferiority complex, but a mechanism that constitutes "social identities generated by conflict within asymmetrical

power relations” (xiii). Puerto Ricans have historically been disadvantaged due to their constant colonial status since the fifteenth century. Colonial oppression is evidenced by the disproportionately large number of Puerto Ricans who depend on welfare and are unemployed. Boricua identities have been produced in a political environment marked by various “sites of ‘colonial’ shame” in which Puerto Ricans have been degraded; as a result, Boricua pride is not a freely chosen affirmation but rather the “effect of a subjection” (6). Since the identity that defines itself as a source of special pride is so closely tied to shame, the identity is “constitutively shameful” and is, inevitably, an indecisive identity (8). One implication of identity confusion can be understood by observing how Puerto Ricans proudly uphold their Boricua ethno-citizen status, even though they are legally Americans. Puerto Rico is an imagined community⁵ that has no legal status as an independent nation, yet its “citizens” demonstrate a high level of ethno-nationalistic pride that rivals the patriotism of people from other countries.

The concept of Puerto Rican shame is central to my dissertation. Colonial shame arises out of Puerto Rico’s historically passive relationship to colonial powers which places them in a backwards position within the global post-colonial community. Shame is an understandably negative emotion and I want to explore how Puerto Ricans attempt to purge

themselves from it. I believe that shame, despite its negative connotations, inspires positive changes because it creates transformative agency. Given that there is a lack of research in the area of colonial shame, I believe that it is important for researchers such as myself to explore it from different angles. Negron-Muntaner focused on how Puerto Rican culture influenced American culture. I to do the opposite. I explore how American influence affects Puerto Rican culture through colonial shame. My dissertation is informed by the following questions: (1) In what ways does Puerto Rican culture attempt to move away from colonial shame? (2) What underlying desires and fears are present in Puerto Rican cultural productions? (3) How does colonial shame create agency in the struggle to achieve cultural currency within the wider American society? (4) How does colonial shame affect transculturation between Puerto Rico and the United States?

In this dissertation I analyze numerous displays of Puerto Rican media culture and spectacles through the eclectic method of diagnostic critique.⁶ The diagnostic critique method, pioneered by Douglas Kellner, encourages scholars to analyze cultural spectacles by using a variety of theoretical frameworks in order to draw out the underlying hopes, dreams, desires, and fears of a society. I am particularly interested in examining how these Puerto Rican spectacles subvert the dominant American colonial discourse. Forms of resistance to colonization have been

constantly produced by Puerto Ricans throughout the years. Americans since the invasion have actively attempted to Americanize Puerto Ricans.⁷ Nonetheless, full assimilation has never been achieved—a fact that has puzzled researchers for years.

My dissertation centers on the argument that media culture and spectacles created by/for Puerto Ricans⁸ often embody a struggle between Puerto Rico and the United States because it regularly manifests itself through spectacles designed to offset shame,⁹ which prevents assimilation. Shame arises out of Puerto Rico's colonial status which is archaic within our globalized world. Colonial shame comes from the stigma associated with Puerto Rico's historical lack of resistance to their demeaning political status. Countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Mexico, for example, all have hero narratives that proclaim their liberation from colonialism yet Puerto Rico does not. Historical passivity has created a type of inferiority complex within Puerto Rico where the shame of being a colony is combated by a zeal to stave off assimilation. This is how colonial shame has become a source of agency that promotes resistance against the colonial powers.

Many scholars interested in the Puerto Rican context have often asked themselves why assimilation has been so sluggish, despite over a hundred years of direct American contact. Prior studies have focused on

language and educational policies, historical perspectives, studies on political rhetoric, and culture. My argument is unique because it makes use of the method of diagnostic critique in order to analyze media culture and spectacles through the lens of colonial shame. Ultimately, my study confirms the positive nature of shame within a society. I found that there are different techniques that Puerto Rican culture uses to try to purge itself from colonial shame but they all have the double goal of obtaining liberation from colonialism and forming a better society despite the failures of the past.

Cultural research, such as my own, that focuses on the Puerto Rican context is needed because there is a sizable Puerto Rican population in the United States. Furthermore, increased globalization and commodification seats Puerto Rico as a favorable location for industries due to their many tax incentives, low-cost labor, and strategic position within the Caribbean. The study of American subcultures not only provides insight into the Puerto Rican culture itself but also uncovers the imperial nature of the United States and sheds light on the complex relationship between the colonizers and the colonized in general.

The concept of Puerto Rican colonial shame as an object of cultural analysis remains vastly unexplored, which lends itself nicely to my view of cultural studies as a form of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy was

popularized with Paulo Freire, who worked closely with indigenous and underrepresented oppressed populations in order to teach them to critically understand the world with the goal of promoting authentic liberation. The ramifications of colonial shame are not widely known among the Puerto Rican population, but I believe that it is a central ideological mechanism that controls aspects of their everyday lives. Exposing the expressions of shame as they operate within a culture is pedagogical because it has the potential to provide insights on Puerto Rican culture while also providing the tools necessary for promoting liberation.

Throughout my dissertation I actively encourage cultural media literacy through my stance as a public intellectual. Douglas Kellner¹⁰ argues that the purpose of cultural media literacy is to provide individuals with the techniques necessary for interpreting and resisting hegemonic media and culture while also promoting “individual sovereignty vis-à-vis media culture and give individuals more power over their cultural environment and the necessary literacy to produce new forms of culture” (2). Critical media literacy provides “an understanding of media culture and suggest[s] ways that it can be understood, used, and appreciated” (2). Cultural media literacy has a liberating effect on society. I have had close contact with the Puerto Rican culture all of my life and I know first-hand

of the need Puerto Ricans have to learn to interpret their cultural productions critically. I believe that public intellectuals are key to promoting hegemonic emancipation. Henry Giroux argues that public intellectuals should engage with issues that shape contemporary society. They promulgate their findings in a way that the general public can understand without unnecessary academic jargon. He explains that too many academic works are written with a “language of rabid individualism and harsh competition” that ignores public interest in favor of individuality and private visions.¹¹ Ben Agger in *Critical Social Theories* promotes a similar critique of American academia and adds that there is a marked tendency within academic disciplines to favor career building over political engagement. The overarching goal of my dissertation is to promote critical analysis and democracy within public spheres through the utilization of diagnostic critique as a form of critical pedagogy.¹² Kellner asserts that when the public gains the tools necessary for decoding their media culture, they in turn become more critical of it and gain the agency to manipulate it to fit their own purposes. The term media culture refers to industrial culture produced for the masses within a capitalist society.

Kellner explains that it is

a form of commercial culture and its products are commodities that attempt to attract private profit produced

by giant corporations interested in the accumulation of capital. Media culture aims at a large audience, thus it must resonate to current themes and concerns, and is highly topical, providing hieroglyphics of contemporary social life.

(1)

Hence, the study of Puerto Rican media culture and spectacles in order to draw out the influences of shame speaks volumes on the political, economic, and social climate of society. Media culture fuses technology with culture in a way that makes its influence reach across barriers that once hindered its influence.

Douglas Kellner, in *Media Spectacle*, argues that the critical examination of media culture and spectacles also provides insight on the balance and distribution of power within a society because it demonstrates “who has the power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not” (2). The analysis of spectacles uncovers the hidden anxieties and motivations that plague society. The spectacle, as conceptualized by Guy Debord, is also central to my analysis of media culture and spectacles.¹³ He explains that “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (1). Spectacles represent the dominant model of the wants and

desires of a society and consist of all types of media culture, including film, advertisement, music, and literature, among others.

Diagnostic critique is one of the theoretical frameworks that guides my analysis of Puerto Rican media culture and spectacles. Kellner, in *Media Spectacle*, explains that diagnostic critique is a way of understanding cultural studies as a combination of media critique with media pedagogy. A diagnostic critique is a multiperspectivist approach that analyzes cultural productions “through dissection of the production of texts, textual analysis of its meanings, and study of their effects and resonance” (29). In other words, diagnostic critique is a cyclical process where cultural productions are analyzed through their historical context and in turn are used to explain the historical context. Society and culture cannot be analyzed without each other because cultural texts embody complex mechanism of meaning that are interrelated with politics, the social environment, and the economy. Kellner explains that “The conception of cultural studies as a diagnostic critique thus combines using social theory to interpret and contextualize phenomena of media culture with developing close readings and situating of cultural texts to elucidate contemporary culture and society” (29). Critical theories within the perspective of diagnostic critique are used eclectically and follow no pre-determined methodology. Kellner argues that the use of a combination of

various critical readings of a text in combination with a historical perspective provides stronger readings than if only one critical theory is used. He explains that “the more of these critical methods one has at one’s disposal, the better chance one has of producing reflexive and many-sided critical readings” (99). Consequently, this multi-perspectival approach is useful to my analysis since the exploration of a cultural object using this method produces a rich and complicated investigation because of the inclusion of multiple critical theories into the analysis itself, instead of focusing on explaining the artifact using just one theory.

Kellner’s use of diagnostic critique centers on the analysis of mega-spectacles. I concede that the analysis of mega-spectacles provides interesting insights on the cultural construction of society, but I would argue that the study of *petit recitis*¹⁴ is also useful, especially with the current increase of self-centered technological use. Mega-spectacles still have influence on culture, but personal spectacles, which I call mini-spectacles, are increasingly gaining influence. Scholars such as Ben Agger, in *Texting Towards Utopia*, argues that increased technological use provides a democratic medium for alienated populations to vent out their frustrations, desires, and fears. The prevalence of text messages, social media, and the instant information of the Internet, for example, provides the public with a new urgency and opportunity to express themselves and

to influence media culture. Some scholars, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, favor small narratives over large narratives, while others, such as Kellner, focus their analysis on mega-spectacles. The convergence of mega and mini-spectacles results in a type of dialogism that is crucial in the analysis of the Puerto Rican culture. Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualizes dialogical truth as the interaction of diverse voices, which results in the manifestation of a “plurality of consciousness” characterized by struggle over meaning. His rendering of the subversive carnivalesque is invaluable to my analysis of the contradictions between Puerto Rican and American culture.

I enrich the scope of diagnostic critique by incorporating the theories of other scholars, particularly in terms of habitus and the Other. Pierre Bourdieu and Emmanuel Levinas are theorists whose concepts are helpful to the analysis of the Puerto Rican condition. Bourdieu conceptualized the term habitus as “the tastes and distances, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of class” (77). Puerto Ricans learn to inhabit a habitus through their interaction with colonial powers, such as Spain and the United States. This habitus positions them as the inferior Other within wider American culture. Levinas explains that identity formation is shaped by one’s interpretation of and relationship to the Other. Colonizer’s

othering of the Puerto Rican people is disrupted by their attempts to rid themselves of colonial shame which serves as motivation to work towards a better, post-colonial, status. Puerto Rico is an interesting case for contrapuntal reading because it has been continuously colonized since the late fifteenth century.

Chapter Overview

The second chapter of my dissertation explores Puerto Rican attempts at moving away their colonial shame to subvert it. This is accomplished through the promotion of alternate historical narratives which are not based in fact but function as the ethno-nation's narrative of heroism and rebellion. I specifically analyze the autobiographical works of Jesús Colón and Esmeralda Santiago in terms of their use of food and bodily functions as catalysts for ethno-national defense.

The third chapter of my dissertation examines how colonial shame influences and promotes ethno-national superiority through a rhetorical analysis of the curricular documents published by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico for the English and Spanish programs from 2000-2010. Both languages hold an official status on the island, yet there is a marked tendency for Puerto Ricans to resist bilingualism despite being Enrolled in English classes from K-12. I ultimately found that the seemingly neutral discourse used by both programs were in fact steeped

with veiled ideological language and arguments that promote ethno-national superiority.

The fourth chapter of my dissertation takes a close look at the Puerto Rican Syndrome as it appears in the independent film, *An American in Puerto Rico*. One of the effects of colonial shame on Puerto Rican cultural productions is that it gives agency to people who normally would not have a valid voice within a colonized society. *An American in Puerto Rico* explores the role of colonial shame within a colonized culture from the perspective of the colonizer. The Puerto Rican director and production team use the white American character, John, as a way to give agency to the plight of colonized subjects. The film also highlights the problem with naming a syndrome specifically “Puerto Rican.” Arguably, anyone who is confronted with the harsh reality of colonialism could suffer from a nervous breakdown regardless of whether they are the colonizer or the colonized.

In chapter five, I examine how colonial shame influences the degree to which Puerto Ricans attempt to control, or at least move away from, the dominant colonial discourse by protesting the effects of the culture industry’s cycle of assumptions. The object of study for chapter five is the music genre of *reggaetón*. The genre of *reggaetón* had origins in Puerto Rico and enjoyed popularity within the island during its early

“underground” years. However, despite the genre remaining relatively popular outside of Puerto Rico, it currently has a negative stigma on the island. I explain that one cause that explains the genre’s decline is the lack of popularity was the culture industry’s homogenization of the genre which promoted a negative view of Puerto Ricans in the public arena.

Notes

1. Carlos Ramirez Barcelo was quoted in The NiLP Report “US Election Ends at Conventions for Territorial Citizens.”
2. These contradictions have been questioned by many Puerto Ricans who ask how their official political status can state that they are free while at the same time an “associated state.” For more information, see Jose Trias Monge’s book, *Puerto Rico*.
3. These examples are frequently discussed in Puerto Rican media culture. One example of a written account can be found in Jesus Colon’s “Colonial Showplace.”
4. For an example of a news article on this topic see Josh Hicks’ article for The Washington Post called “Puerto Ricans who can’t speak English qualify as disabled for Social Security.” The official Social Security Administration report can be found here: https://oig.ssa.gov/sites/default/files/audit/summary/pdf/Summary%2013062_0.pdf
5. For more information, see Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.
6. Diagnostic critique as conceptualized by Douglas Kellner in *Media Culture and Media Spectacle*.

7. An example can be seen in the educational policies that governed official language in the public school system. English was favored as the sole language of instruction after the Foraker Law of 1902, which introduced the Official Languages Act. For more information, see Algrén de Gutiérrez in her book *The Movement Against the Teaching of English*.
8. Both in the United States and Puerto Rico.
9. As discussed by Frances Negrón-Muntaner in *Boricua Pop*.
10. Douglas Kellner in *Media Culture*.
11. See Henry Giroux in “Public Intellectuals.”
12. As popularized by Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux—among others. For more information, see: *Henry Giroux in Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope, Teachers as Intellectuals, Theory and Resistance in Education, The Giroux Reader. Paulo Freire and Giroux in The Politics of Education. Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, The Paulo Freire Reader and Teachers as Cultural Workers*.
13. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.
14. I borrow this term from Jean-Francois Lyotard; it means “little stories” in French.

CHAPTER 2: “COMPOUND HIS SOUL IN THE ENTRAILS OF HELL!”

FOOD AS A WEAPON IN THE CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE
HISTORY

*Colón always intended his writing to help counteract the
prevailing misconceptions and biased views of the
Puerto Rican people held by larger U.S. society.*

—Edna Acosta-Belén 27

One of the effects of colonial shame on Puerto Rican cultural productions is that it creates a space where an alternative to the Island’s passive history can be explored by presenting a subversive colonial narrative. Food for the colonized person takes on a unique political flavor particularly during the transitional period of the late forties and early fifties where Puerto Rico transformed from a territory ruled by military powers into a “Commonwealth” with its own constitution and locally elected officials. This transformation can be seen in the work of Jesus Colón in “Castor Oil: Simple or Compound?” Colón’s humorous use of food in combination with colonial shame becomes a catalyst for rebellion and historical change that allows for a transformation of the traditional narrative surrounding the invasion of Puerto Rico. The island was much criticized during the invasion as being passive during the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. They were accused of being fervent Spaniards one

day and converting to enthusiastic Americans in the blink of an eye. Negrón-Muntaner explains that texts can serve “as a collective dreamwork, a stage for performing *Boricua* national identity as one born not in shame or trauma, but in honor and military might (its reverse)” (39). These “redeeming fictions” are necessary for “founding a heroic national subjectivity...A nation needs to possess a spiritual patrimony of glory and heroism” (36) which explains why several Puerto Rican authors have constructed texts that feature characters that rebel against American influence and in doing so create an alternative narrative to past events. In the case of Colón, he rebels against American colonialism in “Castor Oil, Simple or Compound?” where he appropriates colonial shame in order to subvert it.

In the opening lines of “Nuestra Apatía,” Jesús Colón writes, “Una de las grandes faltas del puertorriqueño ... es que casi nunca le da coraje, no se entusiasma por nada, todo lo toma como venga” [One of the greatest flaws of ...Puerto Ricans is that they never get angry, they do not feel passionate about anything, and they react to everything that comes to them in a passive way] (70). Countermeasures against the negative perceptions of Puerto Ricans greatly influenced the work of Jesús Colón and “Castor Oil: Simple or Compound?” is no exception. This autobiographical text appears in *The Way It Was and Other Writings* by

Jesús Colón, which was published posthumously by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, New York in conjunction with Arte Público Press. These institutions work to recover Latino/a literary and historical texts of the past that have been forgotten. Colón was a prolific writer during his lifetime, but his work mainly appeared in the magazines and newspapers that were published during the latter half of the twentieth century. He published only one autobiographical text in his lifetime, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*, but a wealth of other stories were re-published in *The Way It Was* and *Lo que el pueblo me dice*.

Jesús Colón was born in Cayey, Puerto Rico in 1901. He moved to New York at the young age of seventeen in the quest for better economic opportunities (Edna Acosta-Belén 13). Edna Acosta-Belén notes that:

all of the men and women who succumbed to the lure of the continental shores sought to make a better life for themselves than what was promised in the homeland [...] The common ground in each of their experiences was rooted in the Island government's inability to provide a future for an impoverished population. (13)

Colón had a humble upbringing among the *tabaqueros*¹ of his neighborhood. Despite the illiteracy of most cigar makers, many cigar

factories at the time had a *lector*² who read to the workers during the day. Colón grew up listening to the *lector* because of his house's close proximity to the cigar factory. In "A Voice through the Window" Colón expresses how he enjoys listening to the writings of "Zola, Balzac, Hugo, [...] Kropotkin, Malatesta or Marx" ("A Voice through the Window" 11). These critical writers fostered a love for communism within Colón that would shape his life. The bulk of his writing took place in the aftermath of Operation Bootstrap, which was a period wherein "Puerto Rican writers, from the Island and those living in New York, turned their attention to lending fictional representation to the migration and resettlement experience" (Juan Flores xiv).

Colón's writing is significant to the field of Nuyorican Literature because he was the first Puerto Rican author to publish texts in English for an audience of Puerto Ricans who wanted to stay in New York. According to Juan Flores, Colón's contribution to literature influenced the work of "Piri Thomas, Nicholasa Mohr, Tato Laviera and Sandra Maria Esteves, to name a few, [who] are carrying forward traditions introduced by [him]" (xvii). Colón was an important Puerto Rican writer because he broadened the traditional Puerto Rican audience to include those who lived in the United States and mainly spoke English. Colón's use of English in his autobiographical writing did not point to a preference for that language.

Flores points out that Colón “continued to write and carry out much of his activity in his native tongue [...] He was always a staunch upholder of the right of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic people to participate in North American society free of prejudice because of their language background” (xv). Colón’s writings, irrespective of the language used, were inspired by his desire to eradicate oppression.

There has been a small amount of scholarship dedicated to analyzing the work of Colón. He was virtually unknown until recent times due to his communist affiliations, which did not fit in well during the nineteen-fifties, when most of his work was written. Recently, his work has gained increased academic attention with the work of Arte Público Press and their emphasis on recovering Hispanic authors from obscurity. Several scholars in the field of Latino literature agree that Colón played a seminal role in the development of Latino/a literature in the twentieth century. Scholars such as Juan Flores, Faythe Turner, Ramón A. Gutiérrez et al., and Virginia Sánchez Korroll have read Colón with the collective goal of examining and outlining the emergence, transformation, and dissemination of Latino/a literature in the United States. Recent scholarship on Jesús Colón’s body of work is limited and centers on the areas of race and identity. Maritza Stanchich and Adelaine Holton explore how his racial makeup affected his personal politics. Colón was actively

involved in New York politics and identified himself as a black Puerto Rican. He occasionally discussed the controversial issues of race and ethnicity in his writings. Perceptions of skin color among Puerto Rican migrants were different than they were in the United States, a fact which left many Puerto Ricans struggling to grapple with their identity.

While I do agree that a big picture analysis of the work of Colón is helpful to the field of Latino/a Literature, I also think that it is important to analyze his individual vignettes due to their autobiographical nature, which, at the time, rang true for the many Nuyoricans who read his works that were published in “more than thirty different newspapers, magazines, and letters to the community, labor or political organizations” (Edna Acosta-Belén and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, 20). Careful, rhetorical analysis of these texts can shed light on the complex relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. A textual analysis of his lesser known works point to trends that developed during the first mass migrations of Puerto Ricans to the mainland while identifying repercussions that are still felt today.

Metaphors are well-known pedagogical tools, and it is no surprise that they appear in Colón’s work because he was known for writing instructive publications. Edward Karli Padilla Aponte argues that due to the limited publication space that Colón had to work with, his writings

needed to be succinct, relevant, and interesting to Puerto Rican readers (xx). Overall, his texts were varied in nature and included poetry, letters, short stories, and autobiographical pieces, which had the similarity of being didactic in nature. Steven Miller explains that metaphors are useful because they help people to think about concepts in new ways. In other words, metaphors not only provide explanations but they also “translate” explanations in order to increase comprehension. According to Julie E. Kendall and Kenneth E. Kendall, metaphors are crucial for the societal makeup of a nation (or in Puerto Rico’s case an ethno-nation) because they help to shape reality. They explain that:

By using words that people understand and believe in to make linkages with the new and unfamiliar, the speaker provides the ability to envision the world in a new way. Invoking a metaphor means opening the door for a listener to enter a subject in a different way (149).

Kendall and Kendall’s discussion of metaphors is both relevant and interesting to my argument because metaphors give political agency to the speaker, which in the text, “Castor Oil, Simple or Compound?,” it is Colón that becomes the voice for recent Puerto Rican emigrants who yearn for better opportunities in the United States. Metaphors allow Colón to not only to make sense of Puerto Rico’s colonial status and turbulent past but

to re-imagine past events and passive Puerto Rican historical tendencies to create a hero narrative that moves away from the shame of being a colonial subject.

In addition to Colón's use of metaphors in "Castor Oil, Simple or Compound?," he uses elements of the grotesque—especially the use of low bodily functions—in order to further add significance to his metaphors and strengthen his writing as a violent rebellion against colonialization.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, as found in *Rebelais and His World*, is useful in my analysis of the metaphors found within the text.

"Castor Oil, Simple Or Compound?" deals with a subject matter that is grotesque by American cultural standards. His use of bodily functions, such as digestion and fecal evacuation, are carnival-like elements that readers can identify with. Colón is masterfully able to transform a shameful incident into a humorous vignette in order to gain power.

Bakhtin explains, "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people, they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (7). The carnival essentially transformed people from different social classes and made them all equal—albeit for a brief time. Colón's use of the grotesque and carnivalesque imagery transforms the unbalanced power relationship between the small and impoverished island of Puerto Rico by putting it on equal footing with the great imperial power of the

United States. The carnival was also a place where people could behave in ways that were not socially accepted during the rest of the year. For instance, Bahktin explains that the poor were crowned as kings and the kings were demoted to peasants during the carnival festivities. People during the carnival engaged in acts that were traditionally frowned upon but faced no repercussions during the festivities. Therefore, the use of the grotesque by Colón provided an opportunity to rebel against colonialism in a safe place without consequences. In this way, the carnivalesque as a literary technique used by Colón transforms the grotesque into a poignant social commentary that is easy for readers at all levels to understand while also providing profound insights on how the desire to purge shame can serve as a tool for the reconfiguring of the past.

According to Negron-Muntaner, Puerto Rican people tend to suffer from an immense shame brought on by the passive way in which Puerto Rico reacted to the American invasion. Colonial shame stems from their lack of resistance to colonization and formed the catalyst for many characteristics of Puerto Rican culture. To offset colonial shame, there have been frequent attempts by Puerto Rican scholars and politicians to portray the American invasion of 1898 as an act that was met with physical rebellion and resistance despite the fact that the actual invasion was met with passivity. Negron-Muntaner points out that “political objectives in

the United States have been articulated in ethno-national terms, with a strong emphasis on ‘ethnic defense’ strategies that have consistently valued *boricua*³ culture as a political resource and generative of nonlegalistic (sic) conceptions of citizenship” (6). The tendency to thwart shame through the creation of alternative historical narratives is interesting in light of the metaphors I identify in the subsequent section.

The overarching metaphor I discovered in the narrative centers on how Colón perceived the United States in relation to Puerto Rico. The stomach ache served as the vehicle and the American culture was the tenor. In other words, his constipation was a physical manifestation of the rejection, reaction, and critique against American culture. Colón begins his anecdote by contextualizing his experience with two very important facts. He explained that he had moved to Puerto Rico about a week prior and he made certain that the reader understood that he had a poor command of the English language. He takes great care in highlighting his status as a recent emigrant to excuse his inability to communicate effectively in his new surroundings. Consequently, a perceived weakness in his character is a symptom of his poor schooling by “North American” teachers, which paints him as the blameless victim.

Colón’s description of the useless and ridiculous English classes he endured in his youth is typical of the rhetoric that surrounds language

policies on the island. Language policies in Puerto Rico have been a controversial subject since the American invasion in 1898. Several scholars have attempted to analyze why, despite twelve years of instruction and close interaction with American culture, a startling number of Puerto Rican students graduate high school without knowing English. Jorge Vélez and Sharon Clampitt-Dunlap, for example, found in their respective studies that Spanish retained its supremacy because it was used by politicians, poets, and the media as a way of linking Spanish with Puerto Rican national identity and English with Americanization. Potentially more important, there has never been a sizable influx of people to the island who only speak English. Edith Algren de Gutiérrez argued that “the movement against the teaching of English in Puerto Rico,” which she closely linked to the autonomist movement, will continue indefinitely until the day that the island’s political status is clearly defined. The movement is a subversive and accounts for the resistance that English education received on the island. I will discuss Puerto Rican language policies further in Chapter 3.

Colón describes his (lack of) English language skills as “the linguistic baggage I had to deal with” (33). Baggage is usually heavy, burdensome to carry, yet always present during short trips and important large-scale moves. Baggage in the metaphorical sense refers to the past

emotions, beliefs, and experiences which relate to the English language—and more broadly to American culture—which influenced his stomach ache and the subsequent events described in the vignette. Lynne Cameron and Alice Deignan explain that “Pragmatically, metaphorical baggage is invariably used to express a negative view of past emotions and memories. If a speaker wants to talk about the enriching effects of past knowledge and experience, the corpus data suggest that they will not choose to talk about these as baggage” (679). Therefore, the term “baggage” as used by Colón has a negative connotation and is important to the overall understanding of the text. Cameron and Deignan explain that baggage is linked to “emotional, cultural, ideological, political, [and] psychological” adjectives (679). These adjectives adequately describe Colón’s complex context as a colonial subject who is transposed from the colony to the colonizer’s land. After a brief discussion of language, he proceeds to describe how this *linguistic baggage* was responsible for the unfortunate events that took place at the pharmacy later on.

Colón takes great care in describing the exact address of the pharmacy and even notes that it “had been in the same corner for the last hundred years” (33). Edna Acosta Belén notes that Puerto Rican emigrants during the first half of the twentieth century lived in tight-knit communities. Colón’s audience were fellow Puerto Ricans who lived in

New York, specifically in one of these communities. His description of the pharmacy coupled with its exact address lends credibility to his anecdote. Moreover, the multi-generational permanence of the pharmacy, juxtaposed with the recent immigrant, serves a unifying function because it attempts to involve the audience by allowing them to connect with the setting of the autobiographical vignette. Furthermore, for a pharmacy, or any establishment that sells products to consumers, to survive in a capitalist society/economy, it must be able to cater to the needs of the community. Therefore, Colón's predicament is framed as one that is not unique. The pharmacy, we learn later on, is stocked with several kinds of castor oil, meaning that there is enough demand for it that the pharmacist maintains a regular supply. The age of the pharmacy and the ready availability of certain products create a mental image of a seemingly mundane situation that his contemporary Puerto Rican readers can identify with. The old age of the pharmacy is also significant because it demonstrates that it has survived the waves of various immigrant groups to New York and was even a witness to the Spanish-American War and its aftermath. Ideally, the pharmacy would be adequately prepared to deal with a customer such as Colón, complete with his linguistic baggage, but the pharmacist, as we learn later on, is acutely aloof to his predicament. In a way, Colón presents that pharmacy as a discriminatory establishment

that meets the needs of the community it wishes to serve, irrespective of the needs of the new emigrants such as himself.

Colón explains how his constipation was the result of either the American food or climate, which were both vastly different from that of Puerto Rico. He describes his breakfast that day by using words associated with death to further critique the U.S. The oatmeal he ate that morning was the color of a cadaver and was as “hard as a baseball” (33). The image of a cadaver is meant to demonstrate how repugnant the oatmeal was. The use of the baseball as a metaphor is significant because the game is considered an important part of American culture, frequently called an all-American sport. Baseballs are also very hard objects, which bring to mind the stiffness that a body obtains after death. The bowl that the oatmeal was served in was yellow, cracked, and “pasted with dirt” (33). The image of the bowl is also associated with death, decay, burial. He explains that he also had a coffee, which instead of providing the usual function of warmth and energy, was instead cold and watery. The breakfast experience as a whole is characterized as both unappetizing and uncomfortable. These metaphors work together to paint a grotesque picture of American food and culture by Colón’s association of it with death and decay.

Puerto Rican breakfasts during Spanish colonialism up until the middle of the twentieth century were traditionally comprised of heavy

meals that consisted of rice, beans, meat, and *café con leche* (strong coffee with a lot of milk). These meals were hefty because they were meant to prepare the farm workers and sugar cane laborers for long days of work in the hot and humid climate of Puerto Rico. Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra argues that

the maxim ‘tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are’ has always been a prime factor when it comes both to delineating social and material differences between people and groups and to contemplating or imagining the culinary dimensions of ethnicities, nations, and cultures. (2)

Puerto Ricans are no exception because as colonial subjects they associate food with ethnonational identity. The grotesque portrayal of food in the United States serves as a rejection of Americanization. Colón could have merely described his American breakfast as an unappetizing consequence of the poverty in which he lived. Food in general would have still been considered as the principal agent in his stomach ache, but perhaps he would have described it in a more forgiving tone. He might have even felt thankful that he had any food at all. Colón, however, actively chose to describe his food in the most horrible way possible and in doing so severely critiqued American culture and its so-called suffocating influence on the colonized. Hanna Garth explains that “The public is a legitimate

location for politics and debate, research, and policy. The domestic, on the other extreme, is private and protected from scrutiny” (x). Food is part of the private sphere. Colón’s public use of a matter of which belongs to the private sphere takes the stand that American influence is not only superficially responsible for broad changes within Puerto Rican culture, but it attempts to convert and pervert the private realm as well. Therefore, Colón uses food as a catalyst for a violent rebellion which goes against the pre-established narrative of the passive Puerto Rican.

Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra states that there is a “formation of a kind of intimate bond with food and diet molded by material circumstances [...] This bond speaks to and evokes memories and emotions (good and bad), fixations on flavors and tastes, and—at times—sensations of estrangement” (2). Emotions that were not readily manifested during the colonization process were awoken with Colón’s upset stomach. The act of describing his American breakfast as being so unappetizing and unhealthful, positions Colón as a rebel against American customs, culture, and society. His articulation of the breakfast meal, complete with minute details and grotesque imagery, shows that he recognizes his estrangement from his native land and that he utterly rejects his host country.

After describing his unappealing American breakfast, Colón went on to explain how his stomach worked in Puerto Rico. He metaphorically

compared his stomach in Puerto Rico to a religious ritual. He explained that his stomach used to be calm, serene, pleasant, obedient, and efficient before arriving in New York. He said that his stomach performed the daily “miracle” of turning his food into the nutrients and tissue his body needed. The end product (or, his feces), he described, was always “agreeable” (33). Religious rituals in the metaphoric sense have a positive connotation that brings to mind visions of purity, holiness, and transcendence. The description of digestion puts Puerto Rico on an infallible pedestal. Colón found it his duty to protect and uphold the Puerto Rican culture in the face of corruption by any means necessary. This scenario stands in sharp contrast to the way that events actually played out during the American invasion of Puerto Rico.

For Bakhtin, the celebration of the grotesque and mundane bodily functions allowed people to enter “the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (9). Therefore, the distinction between the inner workings of his stomach in two different contexts juxtaposes the spiritual, pure, and miraculous digestion he had in Puerto Rico with the death imagery he associates with American food, which he blamed for his upset stomach. His yearning for Puerto Rican digestion and agreeable feces celebrated his native land while also positioning himself as an agent for change. His body metaphorically took on the task of starting a

revolution against American colonialism, which Puerto Ricans have historically shied away from compared to other Latin American countries. His body became a utopic space where colonial conflict could be acted out and ultimately resolved.

Colón was experiencing so much discomfort with his constipation that he wanted to desperately get ahold of castor oil. Castor oil was familiar because he remembered using and hearing about it in Puerto Rico. He knew it was hard to swallow, but it was the only cure he trusted to purge the American food and influence from his body. His constipation was metaphorically described using war imagery. He explained: “An internal rebellion threatened to become external any minute. A revolution to erupt from all available outlets of my body” (33). The comparison of the stomach ache to a war metaphorically linked his rejection of American culture with a violent rebellion. Therefore, Colón’s body physically rejected and rebelled against the U.S. unlike the Puerto Ricans after the Spanish-American war, who remained passive. The reaction against America further removed him from Puerto Rican colonial shame because he did not take the invasion passively. His body transformed into a vessel of resistance that actively opposed the United States and in turn proposed an alternative to the historical hegemony between both cultures.

Desperate for relief, he ran to the nearest pharmacy while holding his stomach as if he was about to give birth. It is interesting to note that castor oil is a natural method for inducing labor that has been used on women for centuries. The comparison of his ailing stomach to a pregnant woman painted a picture of how much pain he felt. Revolutions and protests are often difficult and painful in nature, but these birth pains are often necessary to yield the desired results. Bakhtin argues that “Grotesque realism knows no other lower level. [...] It is always conceiving” (21). Grotesque realism is a degradation that destroys earthly norms (which, in this case, is America) and allows it to be reborn with new possibilities.

The pharmacist acted oblivious to Colón’s obvious body language and pretended not to know how to help. Colón was sure that the pharmacist knew exactly what was going on because he noted that the pharmacist wore a “knowing smile” (34). Colón believed that the pharmacist acted oblivious to the situation in spite of his obvious distress in order to cause him further humiliation by forcing him to use the English language. Colón quickly asked for castor oil but was met with a choice. The pharmacist asked him “Simple or compound?” which made Colón reflect on which to choose. While deliberating which type of castor oil to drink, he imagined “flashes of castor oil *compuesto* with ashes and other ingredients

equally infernal ... [and] translated the 'compound' word automatically” (34). He ultimately chose simple and drank it. He did not like the taste or texture of castor oil, but he wrote:

I drew a note of consolation when I congratulated myself for having chosen the castor oil simple, instead of the castor oil compound. Only my dead grandmother and the devil himself would have known all the fiendish oils and ashes that this Yankee (sic) chemist would have mixed into the simple innocently crystal clear castor oil! Compound, eh? Compound his Yankee (sic) soul in the entrails of hell! (34)

The quote illuminates his feelings towards America. He believed that Americans were evil tricksters who went out of their way to harm people who did not know English. Colón views his interaction with the pharmacist as further assurance that he is on the right path of a righteous mission. By thwarting the perceived deceitfulness of the pharmacist, he manages to defeat the evils of Americanism in such a way that previous generations would have been proud. His words serve to condemn American influence to eternal damnation in favor of his cultural heritage. Bakhtin explains that “Various deformities, such as protruding bellies ... are symptoms of pregnancy or procreative power. Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay

transformation. Hell has burst and has poured forth abundance” (91). In the context of the vignette, the renewal of ethnonational pride and rejection of American colonial influence is the result of his bodily ailment. The death imagery related to American food is also brought up in the pharmacy scene when he describes how ashes are mixed with the castor oil. Ashes commonly allude to a religious context, but here Colón turns tradition on its head by making it a tool for evil. To Colón, the exchange between himself and the pharmacist was a battle, and he believed that he was the victor due to his perceived cleverness and keen memory. He was proud that he chose well and outsmarted the “blondie (sic)” apothecary.

On his way to the bathroom on his apartment floor, Colón meets who he described as the fat North American landlady (34). He noted that “she managed to squeeze herself down [the stairs], while I was forcing myself up” (35). His word choice invokes the image of a struggle between two opposites: a thin foreign man versus an overweight native woman, both fighting over the same space in order to reach opposite ends. The allegorical conflict found here alludes to the political struggle between the United States, which is a big country, and Puerto Rico, a tiny island. Colón’s imagery here also serves as a critique of both cultures. The landlady’s movements are forced and the opposite of Colón, which represents how America fights progress by latching on to colonial practices

in a world that is dismantling imperialism. In this light, Colón represents a Puerto Rico who is *moving up* and actively seeking progress.

During this moment, he said that “curiosity conquered the revolution of my bowels” and he pauses for a moment to ask her the difference between the two types of castor oil (35). The landlady roars in laughter at his question and explains that compound castor oil is mixed with various flavors in order to make it easier to drink. For Bakhtin, laughter is universal in nature and includes the person laughing just as much as the person who is being laughed at. The laughter of the landlady puts Colón’s over-the-top situation into perspective. Not only is Colón’s lack of English skills troubling, but the American invasion and subsequent efforts to quickly Americanize Puerto Ricans and their cultural resistance were also ridiculous. She offers help and attempts to defuse the situation with humor, but her efforts come across to Colón as being mocking. He leaves for the bathroom immediately after the brief interaction. During the short exchange with the landlady, Colón accepts that he was indeed wrong in his assumption about compound castor oil. However, he does not show defeat. War words are again used in relation to his constipation, which evoke the feeling that the exchange between Colón and the landlady was also a battle. Instead of admitting defeat or staying a while longer and risking humiliation, he quickly leaves the scene after learning the

information. By swiftly retreating, he does not allow the landlady to ask him any questions and removes himself from a situation that would have required the use of more English.

Snow, a uniquely American feature, was named as a specific element of his torment during his trips to the bathroom that followed the exchange with the landlady. Snow fell on his bare head from a broken skylight in a continuous stream during that troubled night (35). He was forced to endure this slow torture without any options of resistance because of his predicament. Snow in this context represents the reality of the American dream for Colón. He moved to the United States, like many immigrants, in search for a better life. What he found instead was an unwelcoming country that stripped away the comforts he was accustomed to in Puerto Rico. Like the broken skylight, which was too high for him to fix, his situation in America would remain difficult because of his circumstances.

Colón reflects on his English education during the long periods that he was sitting on the toilet or laying down on his beer-smelling couch. It was a memorable night that would trouble him for the rest of his life. He explains, “during the long periods of semi-wakefulness on that couch, I dreamt of the English language classes conducted by the North American teacher” (35). He recalls how the teachers used meaningless drills and

monotonous exercises in an effort to help their pupils to learn English. However, Colón concludes that these efforts were in vain because “that completed the teacher’s daily effort to make us hate forever the language of Shakespeare and Whitman” (36). While sitting on the toilet for the final time, he thinks about how English teachers should have made the classes more useful. Nowhere in the text does Colón admit responsibility for his lack of English skills. Therefore, by playing the role of the blameless victim and not admitting own faults, he was able to off-put the shame that came with being a Puerto Rican in New York.

Colón uses specific descriptive (and sometimes derogatory) terms for all of the people who caused him pain throughout the text. He mentions specifically North American English teacher both at the beginning and end of the text. English teachers in Puerto Rico were recruited from the United States in order to teach English. Textbooks were immediately translated into English and students were not provided with sufficient scaffolding to learn the language. Colón explains in another anecdote that “I realized [...] that all our school books, except our Spanish grammar, were written in English. It would be just as if you New Yorkers or Pennsylvanians discovered one good morning that your children’s school books were all written in German or Japanese⁴” (“Bitter Sugar” 70). Colón had deep feelings of hurt that arose from thinking about how little

regard Americans paid to the Puerto Rican population. The rapid and intense push for assimilation blatantly disregarded native culture and served to further strengthen and lengthen the gap between the colonized and the colonizers.

Colón specifically refers to the Americans that he meets by describing them with exaggerated adjectives that serve to categorize them as being unmistakably American. For example, the pharmacist is described as a “blondie,” and he identifies the landlady as being both fat and North American. He categorizes these *enemies* as being specifically American, yet the only person he references from Puerto Rico in this autobiographical vignette is his grandmother, whom he collectively calls “our grandmothers” as if to generalize that all Puerto Ricans are inherently good compared to their North American neighbors (34). The dichotomy between Americans and Puerto Ricans is odd because both are citizens of the United States, but rhetorical strategies that promote ideological difference and ethnonational pride is a common feature of texts written by Puerto Ricans after the invasion.

Jesús Colón has the unique ability to transfer complex ideas into short humorous vignettes. Acosta-Belén explains that⁵

for him, writing was a didactic and consciousness-raising tool about class, racial and gender oppressions much as the means

to forge a historical record and tradition for his community. It was up to working class people like himself to provide his fellow *compatriotas* with that voice, to speak with the authority of experience in the everyday struggles for survival in the face of poverty and discrimination in the metropolis while building their own communities. Colón always intended his writing to help counteract the prevailing misconceptions and biased views of the Puerto Rican people held by the larger U.S. society (27).

“Castor Oil: Simple or Compound?” is an extended metaphor that critiques American culture in order to eliminate colonial shame through the exaltation of Puerto Rican culture. All references to Puerto Rican culture are painted under the light of religious purity through metaphors that use religious signifiers. On the other hand, all things associated with American culture are painted in a negative light, which includes words that signified negative images of death devoid of spirituality. The clash between the two cultures takes place within his stomach, which is frequently described in harsh terms and with war motifs. The only remedy he trusts to purge his body from American influence is the castor oil, which is bitter and difficult to swallow, but a trusted ally in his new surroundings. His interactions with Americans are described as if they are

battles that he took fierce precautions to win. When he discovers that he had committed an error, he does not admit defeat but instead blames his shortcomings on his North American English teachers. The carnivalesque features and humor present in the text allude to Colón's utopia—a place where he could break free from the shame of being a colonial subject and live in a world without racism and without the misunderstandings that arose due to poor language competency. Colón masterfully pokes fun at himself by sharing with the reader his humorous and honest journey to find castor in the mists of an intense bout of constipation. His use of humor as an antidote represents his appropriation of shame to purge it.

The literary act of turning food into an ideological and political tool is not unique to Colón in Puerto Rican literature. The most anthologized chapter of *When I was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago called “The American Invasion of Macún” also features an autobiographical vignette that centers on Santiago's struggle with Americanization through the description of her body's rejection of American food provided at her school during breakfast. After hearing her father discuss imperialism and discussing the concept with a male classmate, Santiago grudgingly accepts her school's free breakfast only to have her projectile vomit the breakfast in the cafeteria and loudly accuse the faculty and staff of being imperialist supporters. It is interesting to note that Santiago's experience occurred

during Operation Bootstrap which began in 1948 and coincides with the time that Colón wrote “Castor Oil: Simple or Compound?” The similarities between the texts warrant a closer analysis of “The American Invasion of Macún.”

Santiago and Colón both include in their texts examples of how their English classes were ineffective at producing bilingual students in order to highlight the redundancies of American attempts at assimilating Puerto Ricans. Colón’s teacher focused on repetition, and Santiago’s did as well. She began the chapter with a little repetition song⁶ (that is, unfortunately, still used in Puerto Rican schools) that is meant to teach the students vocabulary but is ineffective because it did not allow students to learn the language in a meaningful way. Colón wrote his piece in 1948 while reminiscing about his past experiences while Santiago wrote her book in 1993 but this chapter focused on her experiences as a child in 1952, yet both texts demonstrate that there was little change in education during that time.

The Estado Libre Asociado became Puerto Rico’s official status in 1952 and with it brought many changes that Santiago was acutely aware of as a child. Santiago remembers that her Puerto Rican English teacher⁷:

Miss Jiménez came to Macún at the same time as the community center. She told us that starting the following

week, we were all to go to the *centro communal* before school to get breakfast, provided by the Etado Libre Asociado, or Free Associated State, which was the official name for Puerto Rico in the Estados Unidos, or in English, the Jun-ited Estates of America. Our parents, Miss Jímenez told us, should come to a meeting that Saturday, where experts from San Juan and the Jun-ited States would teach our mothers all about proper nutrition and hygiene, so that we would all grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane, and Sally, the *Americanitos* in our primers. (64).

The meeting on Saturday proved to be of little significance to the village because the experts had trouble communicating in Spanish and made no efforts to make the information easy to understand to an audience who were learning about American standards of nutrition and hygiene for the first time. For example, Santiago notes that the nutrition charts that the experts used to teach the village women did not have the foods that they were used to. Most of the people in the village lived there their whole lives and had never been exposed to things such as peaches, broccoli, or iceberg lettuce. When the audience started to complain that they did not know where to find these American foods and asked if they could make substitutions for locally sourced foods, the nutrition expert grew impatient

and said that there could be no substitutions. At the conclusion of the meeting, each household was given a bag of groceries that contained samples from the major food groups. The bag of food was impractical. Santiago's mother proclaimed, "I don't understand why they didn't just give us a sack of rice and a bag of beans. It would keep this family fed for a month" (68). Nevertheless, her mother tried to follow the expert's advice as much as possible.

In, "The American Invasion of Macún," Santiago demonstrates how the men and women of the village behave differently towards the American influence on the village. The first part of the chapter focuses on the women and how they passively accept "The American Invasion of Macún." The women behave in a manner that correlates to the dominant narrative of the American colonization of Puerto Rico. As I stated earlier, the American invasion of Puerto Rico was met with no resistance by the population. Negrón-Muntaner characterizes the invasion as rape, "The Americans, after all, 'entered' Puerto Rico through an open bay" (53) which brings about feelings of shame and "in turn constitutes the colonial subject's identity as feminine" (54). The men in the village do not readily accept American influence and it is with them that the young Santiago ultimately sides.

The next day at school, Santiago is told that her class will be receiving polio vaccines. While waiting for the vaccine, she gets into an argument with a male classmate who accuses her of not knowing about politics. She recalls that all of her knowledge about politics came from things that her father taught her or things that she learned from eavesdropping on adult conversations. She eventually proved to her friend that she knew as much as he did about politics but this made him angry because he was being shown up by a girl. He ended the conversation abruptly by calling the president an imperialist *gringo*.⁸ At home, Santiago asked her father what an imperialist was. Her father explained:⁹

In 1898, *los Estados Unidos* invaded Puerto Rico, and we became their colony. A lot of Puerto Ricans don't think that's right. They call *Americanos* imperialists, which means they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs...Being an American is not just about language, *Negrita*, it's a lot of other things...Like the food you eat...That's part of being an imperialist. They expect us to do things their way, even in our country. (73)

Santiago then asks her father if she will become an American by eating the free food that they receive at school. He replied by saying, "Only if you like it better than our Puerto Rican food" (74). The brief conversation about

food shaped the way that Santiago viewed the United States. She no longer saw them as the women of her village did. She viewed their increasing influence on the village as an invasion. Food takes on a symbolic meaning in Santiago's world. While Santiago and her father recognize the physical purpose of food which provides nourishment to the body, her father places the idea that food as a symbol for a culture as more important. In other words, food is necessary to sustain life but food preferences point to one's patriotism. Santiago's father attempts to move away from colonial shame by actively resisting the colonizers' influences by consciously controlling how he feels about Puerto Rican versus American cuisine.

The next morning, she went to school early to eat breakfast. She noticed that the building had changed and was now covered with American posters. She recalled, "In a corner, the Puerto Rican seal, flanked by our flag and the Stars and Stripes, looked like a lamb on a platter. Above it, Ike and Don Luis Muñoz Marín faced each other smiling" (75). She saw these decorations as flat and lifeless. When she reached the food, she immediately felt repulsed by it. Her girlfriends, on the other hand, were excited about it and exclaimed that it tasted good. Santiago, who was now holding up the line of students behind her, asked what each thing on her plate was. She was told that everything came from the United States. Her friends were impressed by the American breakfast, but she had

a difficult time eating it. She recalled after the meal, “I was glad that the food wasn’t tasty” (76).

On another occasion, the students were given warm milk and a dollop of peanut butter for breakfast. Santiago stared at the glass of warm milk with the peanut butter “blob” that sat at the bottom of the glass. She swirled her drink with a spoon and hesitantly tasted it. She recalled, “The peanut butter, which was supposed to dissolve in the milk, broke off into clumps, like soft pebbles. I gagged, and the glass fell out of my hand, spilled over my uniform, and crashed to the tile floor where it broke into large chunks...I threw up” (82). At this point, all eyes were on Santiago. A teacher went to her and started to accuse her of making a mess on purpose. Santiago protested and said that the milk tasted awful. To which the teacher said that it is worse to go hungry every day. Santiago replied at the top of her voice, “I’ve never gone hungry! My Mami and Papi can feed us without your disgusting *gringo* imperialist food!” (82). Santiago’s outburst surprised everyone and she was sent home.

It is interesting to note that the breakfast that made Santiago take a stand against “the invasion” was warm milk and peanut butter. These foods metaphorically represent the United States and Puerto Rico. The white milk took up most of the glass and caused the brown milk to sink below its depths. Any attempt to blend the two was futile because the

peanut butter refused to fully dissolve into the milk. Young Santiago disliked American food because she did not want to be an American. The argument can be made that this particular meal, not her first contact with American food, caused her to rebel because it reminded her most of American imperialism.

Santiago told her mother that she threw up in the cafeteria, and she recalled that she fell¹⁰ “into a faint that lasted so long that by the time I woke up from it, she had ...washed me down with *alcoholado*. For days I lay sick in bed, throwing up, racked by chills and sweats...After what seemed like weeks, I went back to school, by which time the elections had been won, [and] the breakfasts ceased” (83). Santiago’s sickness was a success because it lasted long enough that she did not have to be exposed to the “American Invasion of Macún” any longer. Her health returned after removing all traces of America from her body through the spectacle that she caused in the cafeteria and by receiving a traditional Puerto Rican folk remedy by her mother. Her rebellion lasted for an undefined period of time, but it was a success because she did come into contact with the “invaders” again.

Santiago begins the chapter by stating that “What doesn’t kill you, makes you fat” (63). In the context of the chapter this popular idiom takes on a unique meaning. American food is what literally makes Santiago (and

Colón) sick, but it also forms the catalyst for rebellion. Neither Santiago nor Colón suffered any serious repercussions from their American meals, but the aftermath of their experiences led to reflections on what it means to be Puerto Rican colonial subjects. Autobiographical vignettes such as these are shed light on the controversial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico while also pinpointing the germinating seeds of trends that still affect both cultures.

The texts discussed in this chapter demonstrates how one way for Puerto Ricans to move away from colonial shame is through the creation of a hero narrative that provides an alternative to the passive history that characterizes the island. The rebelliousness that characterizes the symbolic use of food by Colón and Santiago helps oppressed readers to critically think about the past and, in turn, it helps them to imagine how they could shape the world through small, subversive, acts. Therefore, colonial shame inspires liberation from the oppressive colonial status of the island.

Humorous situations are used by both authors in satirical ways that point to strength and a removal from colonial shame. Shame can be brought on by several instances, I can walk in to a room filled with my superiors with my fly open and this will cause me a lot of shame but what I do with my shame is what makes the difference. Colón and Santiago demonstrate that they can not only take hold of the shame that comes from being a colonial

citizen but that they have the courage to see it from a humorous angle.
They re-tell their experiences for an audience in a way that inspires critical thinking about the past and the future of Puerto Rico.

NOTES

1. *Tabaqueros* is the Spanish term for cigar makers.
2. Edna Acosta-Belén explains that a “*lector* (reader) focused the morning’s presentation on current news and world events, while the afternoon highlighted more substantial literary fare, creating thereby the most enlightened men and women among the working class” (15).
3. *Boricua* is the indigenous way to refer to a Puerto Rican; the word comes from Borinquén, which is the Taino name of Puerto Rico.
4. His reference to German and Japanese is significant in the context of 1948 during the time that “Castor Oil, Simple or Compound?” was written. He uses these countries as a comparison to the unjust condition of the Puerto Rican colony.
5. *Compatriotas* is Spanish for compatriots.
6. *Pollito*, chicken,
Gallina, hen,
Lápiz, pencil
And pluma, pen.

Ventana, window,
Puerta, door,

Maestra, teacher

And piso, floor.

7. *Centro communal* is Spanish for community center. *Americanitos* is the Spanish diminutive of American and has negative connotations.
8. *Gringo* is the derogatory slang word for a white American.
9. *Negrta* is a term of endearment given to women who have brown skin.
10. *Alcoholado* is a type of alcohol rub that is used to heal the body of multiple illnesses.

CHAPTER 3: THE ESL DILEMA: CURRICULAR DOCUMENTS AS
MECHANISMS THAT PERPETUATE PUERTO RICAN COLONIAL
SHAME THROUGH ETHNO-NATIONAL SUPERIORITY

At the time of the U.S. takeover ...Spanish had served as the Island's national language for some 930 years. From the start, programs and policies designed to Americanize its war-booty were instituted by the United States. This process has also been described as Anglicization Or the conversion of the language of the Puerto Rican people from Spanish to English. This was the first taste of U.S. language policy for Puerto Ricans within a colonial relationship.

—Juan Cartagena 3

Jesús Colón and Esmeralda Santiago shared similar feelings with regards to the English language. Both authors wrote in and of distinct time periods, but they both equated the English language with imposed Americanization tactics and with a loss of Puerto Rican culture. These similar perceptions and confrontations with the English language are not a coincidence. Discussions of Puerto Rican language policies have been commonplace in the political arena since the American invasion. Language policy debates are as common a discussion in public and political forums as are discussions of Puerto Rico's official status and justly so because both topics are very much related to one another.

Puerto Rican Language Policy

Edith Algren de Gutiérrez argues that language has been used as an ideological weapon by the Puerto Rican intelligentsia since the end of the Spanish-American War. Specifically, 1898-1917 marked the beginning of the movement against the teaching of English whose ramifications can still be felt today. These ideological attacks on language acquisition were further compounded by the language policy schizophrenia that the Department of Education endured during the first half of the twentieth century. Algren de Gutiérrez explains the complexities of the period and is worth quoting at length:

All told, Puerto Rico has had seven official language policies between 1898 and 1949. These policies, named hereafter (sic) the Commissioner of Education responsible for their implementation, are the following:

--Eaton Clark (1898-1900)

The original intent of this policy was to teach no Spanish at all. English was to be the medium of instruction in all grades.

--Brumbaugh (1900-1903)

Spanish was the medium of instruction in the elementary grades and English was a subject. In the high school, this pattern was inverted.

--Faulkner-Dexter (1903-1917)

This policy reverts back to the Eaton-Clark policy of using English as the medium of instruction in all grades, except that Spanish was taught as a subject.

--Miller-Huyke (1917-1934)

Spanish and English alternated as a subject and the medium of instruction. The first four grades used Spanish as the medium of instruction, grade five was transitional with half of the core subjects taught in Spanish and the other half in English, and grades six through twelve used English as the medium of instruction.

--Padín (1934-1937)

This policy reverts back to the Brumbaugh policy of using Spanish in the elementary grades and English in the high school as the medium of instruction.

--Gallardo (1937-1935)

This policy evolved through various programs. Basically, Spanish was the medium of instruction in grades one and two with English as a subject. In grades three through eight, Spanish and English were used as the medium of instruction in varying subjects, coupled with a progressive increase in the

time allotted to English as a subject. Three different approaches were followed for the teaching of English in grades seven and eight. English became the medium of instruction at the high schools, with Spanish taught as a subject. In 1942, this policy reverted back to the Padín policy.
--Villaronga (1949-present)

Spanish is the medium of instruction at all levels of the public school system with English taught as a preferred subject. (10).

The implementation of the Villaronga policy coincided with the first democratically elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, and marked the time when language policies “became intertwined with the political question of the status of Puerto Rico” (Cartagena, 4). The Villaronga policy has remained in effect for over half a century, but it too has been steeped in controversy within the movement against teaching English.

Algren de Gutiérrez explains that, in 1981, a bill was introduced by legislator Sergio Peña Clos which would have required private schools to follow the Villaronga policy. Private schools on the island tend to favor English intensive curricula and fiercely opposed the bill which ultimately did not come to fruition. Furthermore, in 1986 the then Secretary of Education, Awilda Aponte Roque, announced her intention of completely

eliminating English as a subject in elementary school grades. Aponte Roque's initiative was ultimately unsuccessful but inspired other attempts to modify the language policy in subsequent years. Sandra Rodríguez-Arroyo explains that in 1991 "After a series of public hearings about official language(s), Governor Rafael Hernández Colón revoked the Official Language Act of 1902, which had established English and Spanish equivalent official status...The law established Spanish as the official language" (91). This law was quickly reverted in 1993 with the new governor, Pedro J. Rosselló, who also developed and implemented the Project for the Development of a Bilingual Citizen in 1997. This project did not reach any meaningful goals, however, because it was revoked with the new government officials in 2001. The topic of increasing bilingualism in school did not come up again until 2008 when Governor Luis Fortuño declared that his goal was to have all public school students achieve full bilingualism within the next ten years through the implementation of bilingual public schools. Governor Fortuño's project failed, like the others, due to a change in government in 2013.

The political spectacle surrounding language policies in the public school system of Puerto Rico is worthy of study due to its fluid and controversial nature. These spectacles manifest themselves with each new political cycle and are carried out in view of the Puerto Rican public and

have been immortalized in various Medias such as newspaper articles, videos, social media, etc. I argue that a key aspect of the political spectacle of language debates has remained unexplored by researchers in the field of Puerto Rican studies. Specifically, I examine the curricular documents published by the English and Spanish programs because I believe that a careful analysis of their rhetoric provides insight into the inner working of the controversies surrounding both languages. Douglas Kellner coincides with my position with regards to the importance of analyzing written texts produced within political spectacles and argues that discursive analysis of texts within a genre pose important “theoretical vision and insight” (298). Curricular documents also have relevance in the wider scope of this dissertation because, as James W. Tollefson, argues, researchers need “to be aggressive exploring how language policies have an effect on the lives of individuals and groups who many times do not have any authority over the policymaking process” (Rodríguez-Arroyo, 81). Teachers in Puerto Rico are required to implement these curricular documents in their daily lesson plans which make them particularly influential in shaping and maintaining language tensions on the island.

Sandra Rodríguez-Arroyo explains that “The latest Census data [from 2010] shows how even with all the language policies implemented in Puerto Rico since 1898, only about 15% of Puerto Ricans report they speak

English ‘very well’ ” (94). The lack of bilingualism is also unusual because the importance of English is highlighted when considering that Puerto Rico is surrounded by other Caribbean countries that speak English, the English language is important for global communication and is the lingua franca of the business sector, and bilingualism and multiculturalism are essential skills in the contemporary globalized world, not to mention the historical trend of Puerto Ricans cyclically migrating to and from the United States.

Bilingual people partake in many benefits that learning two languages can entail in academic, social, and economic realms (Dreifus; Savoie). In my experiences as an educator, which parallel those of my peers, it is the norm for English and Spanish teachers in Puerto Rico not to build from one another’s lessons. The apparent lack of collaboration between both programs is unfortunate, especially considering Luis Moll’s findings, and those of many other scholars; students can transfer the skills that they know from their first language into their second language. The importance of curricular collaborations is also mirrored by Dr. Long, as mentioned by Ismael Rodríguez Bou. Long wrote a report on the condition of English education in Puerto Rico and found that there is very little coordination of the work of English teachers with that of Spanish teachers in the high schools. Both languages would gain from a certain amount of

coordination at all levels. Jim Cummins' ideas and research in second language acquisition theory also confirm these findings. He argues that there is a common underlying proficiency within the process of second language acquisition, which allows and facilitates the transfer of skills from a student's first language to a second. In other words, students use their native language to help them with their target language.

Notwithstanding the well-documented benefits of bilingualism, Spanish language monolingualism remains prevalent on the island.

Several scholars in the past have studied the tendency to use language as an ideological weapon, but previous scholarship does not address curricular documents and their role in the language dilemma in Puerto Rico, despite having the most influence on the public school system and overall language maintenance. This chapter is inspired by Tollefson's question "How are preferred forms of knowledge created and sustained among groups affected by language policies?" (45). With regards to the Puerto Rican context, Frances Negrón-Muntaner describes the relationship between shame and identity as "largely made up of the desire to purge, want, deny, destroy, resignify (sic), and transfigure the constitutive shame of being Puerto Rican from our bodies and public selves" (xiv). I argue that language in Puerto Rico has historically been tied to identity and is a tool for a rebellion that offsets the shame of colonialism

by promoting the use of Spanish over English through ethnonational superiority over the colonizers. Therefore, colonial shame is a factor that explains why Puerto Rico has remained largely monolingual despite the known benefits of bilingualism and extensive contact with the United States for over a century.

My analysis of curricular documents from the Spanish and English programs published from 2000-2010 by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico sheds lights on how the effects of colonial shame influence language maintenance on the island despite the benefits of bilingualism. The DEPR documents studied in this chapter are dated from the year 2000 until 2010. I choose to focus on the first decade of the 21st century because it contained the most amount of curricular activity. The DEPR published a total of three curricular documents for each academic program in this decade alone. The curricular variety was due in part to the constant change of government and secretaries of education. The schizophrenic political environment is perfect for my analysis of shame and its relationship to language. The documents published during 2000-2010 included the following curricula: standards which include the *Standards of Excellence 2000* (abbreviation: SE 2000), *Curricular Framework 2003* (abbreviation: CF 2003), and grade level expectations which are called the *Content Standards and Grade Level Expectations 2007* (abbreviation:

CS&GLE 2007) found in each program. These documents include all grade levels: elementary, intermediate, and high school. These curricular documents are important tools in all public education classrooms. Teachers are trained rigorously on how to implement them during the teacher certification process and they are required to refer to them in each individual lesson plan.

The mandatory use of a standardized curricular document in Puerto Rican public schools is a relatively recent phenomenon that began with the implementation of the Standards of Excellence in 2000. The SE (2000) for the English program begins with Circular letter 3-2000-2001. Circular letters published by the DEPR, and signed by the secretary of education, are interpretations of Federal and local laws that all employees and public schools must observe. These letters remain in effect indefinitely unless a new letter is published that directly states that it amends a previous circular letter. In other words, circular letters are rules and regulations that must be implemented in all public schools. Circular Letter 3-2000-2001 provides the rationale behind the creation and implementation of the SE 2000. The circular letter states that the SE (2000) was written in order to conform to “Law 149 of July 5 [1999], known as the organic law of the Department of Education” (Standards of Excellence, Circular Letter p.1). Law 149 “establishes that the central benchmark of education is to assure

the growth and development of the student in all his/her physical, mental, social, emotional, and ethical-moral aspects” (Standards of Excellence, 2000, Circular Letter p.1). Circular letter 3-2000-2001 was not reprinted in the Spanish SE (2000), but it was the law that governed all curricular programs.

Organic Law 149 was trumped by NCLB in 2001 with the main purpose of raising school accountability by requiring highly qualified teachers and that all public schools measure student learning and improvement through annual assessments. To satisfy these requirements, Puerto Rico began to require that all teachers successfully complete a certification program in their area of expertise. The DEPR also began to assess their students through the annual implementation of the Pruebas Puertorriqueñas de Aprovechamiento (PPA) or the Pruebas Puertorriqueñas de Evaluación Alternativa. Failure in these requirements or one of the many others set forth by the NCLB meant added initial help to schools but resulted in a long-term risk of punitive measures if the standards were not reached in a certain number of years.

The PPA test was first administered in 2002. These exams were designed to test the skills covered in the curricular documents of the English, Spanish, and Math programs. In theory, the exam should be relatively easy for the students to pass because it covers the skills that they

should have learned in class over the past year. However, as of the 2010-11 school year, 1,225 out of 1,482 public schools in Puerto Rico are under an improvement plan due to their low-test scores (Keila López Alicea). Within the 2011-12 school year, the number of schools which were under an improvement plan in Puerto Rico increased to 1,262 (Department of Education). The lack of cross-curricular connections between the English and Spanish programs, which I will discuss in detail in the remainder of the chapter, is one factor that explains these results.

I draw out the instances of diversion between these programs because I believe that the omission of cross-curricular connections speaks volumes on Puerto Rican colonial shame with regards to language on the island. Specifically, this comparison shows the extent that Spanish is promoted over English and how ethnonational superiority manifests itself in curricular documents. The remainder of the chapter will focus on identifying the differences between the curricular documents of the Spanish and English programs to interrogate how knowledge/language maintenance proposed in curricular documents serves as a tool for off-putting colonial shame through the promotion of ethno-national pride.

My analysis of the curricular documents will begin by examining the surface level differences between both programs. I will focus on curricular elements such as page length and general content in order to get

the general differences between both programs. Next, I will focus my analysis on the specific content of the curricular documents. Here is when I draw out specific instances where I observe clashes between both language programs. The top-down approach to my analysis helps me understand the motivations of the curricular documents.

English and Spanish have been the official languages of Puerto Rico since the early 20th century, but the status of English has been marked with controversy, and a lot of policy flip-flopping has taken place. The most recent law that declared English and Spanish as the official languages of Puerto Rico was enacted in 1993 and has yet to be repealed. Therefore, at least on paper, it would seem that the curricular documents of both academic programs would be similar because both languages hold equal weight on the island.

Nevertheless, while examining the English and Spanish curricular documents regarding general content, I found several differences. The first disparity among the documents, which was the most obvious, is the difference in length of the Spanish documents versus the English documents (see Table 1). Table 1 demonstrates the extent that the Spanish curricula are more detailed than their English counterparts. Clearly, Table 1 shows the different weight that each language holds for the Department of Education of Puerto Rico. The disparity between both programs is to be

expected in part because of Spanish’s dominant status in Puerto Rico. However, these documents are just curricula meant to be used by educators to teach students one 50 minute English/Spanish class a day. Page difference may also be expected because Spanish is more widely spoken in Puerto Rico than English and because it is the majority of students’ first language, and thus more content knowledge is to be expected. More detail is needed to better guide Spanish teachers. Still, the page difference becomes an issue when examining the content of these documents.

Table 1: Curricular Document Page Count

Spanish Curricular Documents	
<i>Standards of Excellence (2000)</i>	141
<i>Curricular Framework (2003)</i>	195
<i>Content Standards and Grade Level Expectations (2007)</i>	112
TOTAL PAGES	448
English Curricular Documents	
<i>Standards of Excellence (2000)</i>	94
<i>Curricular Framework (2003)</i>	84
<i>Content Standards and Grade Level Expectations (2007)</i>	91
TOTAL PAGES	269

The biggest difference was in the CF (2003) where the Spanish program had 111 more pages than its English counterpart. The Spanish program provides their teachers with much more detailed documents. The discrepancy in detail and length points to the weighted importance that is given to the Spanish curriculum.

In the English curricular documents, the amount of pages spent on explaining the diverse teaching techniques and methods range from 3 pages in the English SE (2000), 11 pages in the English CF (2003), and 18 pages in the English CS&GLE (2007). In other words, out of all three English curricular documents, only 32 pages are dedicated to providing English teachers techniques, methods, and strategies for classroom use. The Spanish documents, on the other hand, have many more pages dedicated to this same purpose. Furthermore, in the Spanish SE (2000) there are 3 pages, 66 pages in the Spanish CF (2003), and 27 pages in the Spanish CS&GLE (2007), which provides a total of 96 pages being devoted to explaining the methods and techniques that teachers can use in their classrooms. The 64-page difference is enormous given the fact that both are language courses that comprise the same amount of course time throughout a given school year. The document with the greatest differences in the number of pages is the *Curricular Framework*. As explained above, a big part of the difference lies in the amount of detail

provided to the Spanish teachers and the various techniques and methods that they can use in their classrooms. This information is provided in Table 2. The length of the document shows the difference in teacher support that educators in both programs receive. The English curricular documents barely have any pages dedicated to describing different teaching methods to the educator. However, the Spanish documents include noticeably more teacher guidance. It is possible that the imbalance in emphasis and detail is a semi-conscious effort on the part of the creators of both the Spanish and English curricula to maintain the imbalance between Spanish and English, which would then continue to secure Spanish as the primary language.

Table 2: Number of Pages that Explain Teaching Methods and Techniques

Document	English Program Number of Pages	Spanish Program Number of Pages
<i>SE</i> (2000)	3	3
<i>CF</i> (2003)	11	66
<i>CS&GLE</i> (2007)	18	27
Total	32	96

The number of collaborators on the English and Spanish curricular documents varies widely in the Spanish and English CF (2003). The Spanish CF (2003) lists 99 educators along with their credentials and the English CF (2003) only lists 32 educators, two of which have no credentials listed. The fact that the Spanish CF (2003) has 67 more collaborators when compared to the English program potentially shows the importance that the DEPR places to the Spanish program. The number of collaborators is political in nature because when the Partido Nuevo Progresista¹ was in power for the redaction of the Spanish and English SE (2000), the collaborators of both of the programs were the same in number. Yet, the Spanish and English CF (2003) were published while the Partido Popular Democrático ² party held office. The political party is important to note because with the change in government, came a change in the number of contributors that each document was provided.

The next difference I examined between the documents of the Spanish and English programs are in the general content standards of each (Table 3). Content standards represent the main focus areas that students will concentrate on while studying a particular subject. Within the content standards, the course sequence is described according to the grade level and subject. The following Table has the names of these content standards of the CF (2003) and CS&GLE (2007) of both programs.

The SE (2000) of the English and Spanish programs were omitted because its content standards are the same as the CF (2003). For this part of the study, I examined the different skills that should be learned in both the English and Spanish programs.

Table 3: Content Standards found within the Curricular Documents

Spanish Curricular Documents: Content Standards	
CF (2003)	I. Comunicación Oral y Comunicación Escrita, Producción de Textos [Oral and Written Communication, Production of Texts]
	II. Discriminación Auditiva, Lectura y Observación [Auditory Discrimination, Reading, and Observation]
	III. Investigación y Tecnología [Technology and Investigation]
	IV. Ética, Estética y Cultura [Ethics, Esthetics, and Culture]
CS&GLE (2007)	I. Comunicación Oral [Oral Communication]
	II. Comunicación Escrita [Written Communication]
	II. Comprensión de Lectura [Reading Comprehension]
English Curricular Documents: Content Standards	
CF (2003)	I. Oral Communication
	II. Written Communication
	III. Reading Comprehension
	IV. Literary Appreciation
CS&GLE (2007)	I. Listening/ Speaking
	II. Reading
	III. Writing

As the chart shows, the English and Spanish content standards differ most in the *Curricular Framework*. The English version of the CF (2003) simply focuses on the four strands of language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) with an emphasis on reading (reading comprehension and literary appreciation). However, the Spanish CF (2003) includes content standards that cover skills other than the four main language strands. The Spanish program is responsible for teaching students investigative and technological skills along with showing them skills that tie into ethics, aesthetics, and culture; these areas can also be included in the English curriculum.

The differences between the programs can be further observed by analyzing the following examples. The English and Spanish CS& GLE (2007) included three content standards which include Listening and Speaking, Writing, and Reading. The skills that students had to master for the Spanish program were not easily transferable to their English class. For example, in the Listening and Speaking content standard, students in the Spanish class had to recognize a speaker's tone, enthusiasm, and different effects of conversation in formal and informal settings. However, this same content standard in the English programs makes no mention of these skills despite the obvious crossover potential. Furthermore, in the Writing content standard, students in Spanish class are expected to

recognize the influence of English and other languages in the Spanish language. Conversely, the recognition of Spanish's influence on the English language is ignored. A discussion over this topic would be helpful for ESL learners in order to help them identify cognates and false cognates. Furthermore, technology use is discussed in the Spanish program as an aid in research and oral presentations. Technology is never mentioned in the English programs despite many computer programs being in English as well as many web sources such as database journals. Curricular writers failed to acknowledge how technology can potentially be used in all academic subjects, and these skills can easily transfer from one class to another.

The trend in having higher expectations for the Spanish program over the English program can be seen in numerous aspects of the curriculum, not just in how NCLB is enforced. However, this is not surprising in the sense that students in English speaking states would not be held responsible for being tested in a foreign language to meet NCLB standards. The length of the documents is also important because it shows the higher expectations of the Spanish program. The Spanish program is expected to form the core of each student's academic repertoire and it includes skills that are fundamental to all students such as culture and

technology. However, these same expectations are not present in the English programs because the focus is more skills based.

Throughout my years of teaching in a variety of schools in Puerto Rico, teachers seemed to always be talking about the amount of change in the school every time there is a change in governor. Political instability was a phenomenon that was also corroborated by Kevin Carroll. However, my analysis of the curricula suggests that despite the publication of different documents every time there is a new governor, very little changes in terms of content. I expected to see a greater correlation between political party and document content. Throughout the years and despite several political changes, I found a limited amount of curricular modification among the English and Spanish curricular documents with regards to the scope and sequence of each program. I find this limited change to be positive in nature because curricular documents should not have to change according to the political party currently in power. Ultimately, I discovered that the DEPR is just putting a new name on an old document.

The biggest change in the documents came with the English and Spanish CS&GLE (2007). However, the changes consist in the scope and sequence of each program becoming more condensed. For example, the language strand of Literary Appreciation which was present in the English

SE (2000) and the English CF (2003) merged with the Reading Comprehension strand. Furthermore, the Spanish content standards were changed to reflect their English counterpart. Previously, the Spanish program had content standards that dealt with Investigation and Technology and Aesthetics, Ethics, and Culture in the Spanish SE (2000) and the Spanish CF (2003). In the CS & GLE (2007), both the English and the Spanish documents had content standards which consisted of Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

The comparative analysis of document-length teaching techniques, number of contributors, and general content standards of the curricular documents in question paint a trend that is in tune with my argument that colonial shame manifests itself through language policy. The Spanish program documents clearly had an advantage in all the comparisons that I discussed in this section.

The next phase of my analysis consisted of performing a close reading of the content of the curricular documents themselves to draw out any instances where the Spanish and English languages pit against each other. English and Spanish are both the official languages of PR, but as stated before, there has historically been a tendency to look at the English language as a threat. The goal of this section is to demonstrate that the language contained in the curricular documents is entrenched with the

desire to purge colonial shame through the exaltation of the Spanish program and the belittling of the English program. The shame that entails Puerto Rico's colonial status is reversed through the promotion of ethnonational superiority over the dominant colonial power. The phenomena of viewing language as a weapon in Puerto Rico is not new, but my analysis clearly shows the scope that these ideological battles reach. Curricular documents are meant to serve as guides for educators to help them to create lesson plans that aid in student learning. Therefore, the promotion of language as a weapon mentality within these documents sheds light on the perilous effects of colonialism within the colonial subject. The desire of the colonial subject to purge the shame of colonialism through the promotion of ethnonational superiority is strong enough to affect seemingly neutral curricular documents.

After the careful analysis of the curricular documents published by the English and Spanish programs of the DEPR from 2000-2010, it appears that the curriculum editors were careful to treat English language teaching in a non-threatening way. They also stress their collaboration with Spanish program (and not the other way around). For example, page ii of the SE (2000) of the English program states that bilingualism is "part of the curriculum core of all subjects." This phrase is interesting because it makes it seem like bilingualism should be one of the ultimate goals of all

subjects (including Spanish). In the CF (2003) of the English program, the editors eloquently explain why English has not gained second language status in Puerto Rico:

A myriad of decisions and reversals and the resulting uneasiness and concern about the success of the teaching and learning of English has had a destabilizing effect on Puerto Rico. It lingers on even until today... The bilingual teaching decision has always been regarded as a decision taken by an outside entity. As such, it has been rejected as having a 'foreign influence.' It is seen as a major threat to the very core of Puerto Rico's cultural and linguistic identity (1).

These lines clearly point to the troubled relationship that language has in Puerto Rico's colonial context. The editors hope to alleviate tensions between both languages by conceding that English is a threat. The editors further state that "Schools need to address the problem that many students and their parents perceive English as a threat" (14). In other words, schools are a place where open dialogue about the English language *could* take place. What they mean is that English should be the second language that Puerto Ricans learn after Spanish. Thus the term "second language" becomes a sequential one, thus making the term ESL "less politically and socio-psychologically charged" (8). The editors explain:

Above all, English as a second language has to be taught in a socio-linguistically non-threatening environment, recognizing (and reassuring the L2 learners and their parents) that Spanish is and will be the students' vernacular...Collaboration between the Spanish and English programs is, therefore, necessary and crucial (12).

The editors of the CS&GLE (2007) of the English program also think along these lines when they state that “each student should feel committed to the vernacular language, Spanish, and to his/her Hispanic culture, while simultaneously developing a high sense of solidarity, respect, and appreciation for other people and other cultures” (14). They also mention that “collaboration between the English and Spanish programs is crucial and necessary” (14). Not surprisingly, frank dialogue between the educators and parents on the perceptions of the English language do not occur. Dialogues of this nature are carried forth in specialized university settings or displayed publicly in political forums. By treating English as a delicate subject that is constrained to the confines of the political imaginary, English is seen as an undeniable tool by the colonizers to gain and maintain control much like they did throughout history with the Native American population. The editors of the CF (2003) for the English program elaborate on this and state that:

The teaching of English in Puerto Rico has long been affected by the close connection that exists between language and identity and between a person's vernacular and his/her feelings of belonging to a specific language community. In the same way, there is also a close link between a country's language policy and its future development - political, cultural, economic and otherwise. Once a child has developed a vernacular language identity by school age, any attempt to modify this identity to include another language creates conflict in the second (or foreign) language (L2) learner and needs necessarily to be followed by conflict resolution (6).

The author of that statement is not mentioned, nor do the editors provide the readers with studies that prove that statement to be true. The editors believe that student exposure to English needs to be followed by conflict resolution, and they propose that a compromise must be held between both languages in order for English learning to be successful. While the adversarial way of viewing language is to be expected in the context of colonial shame, I do not believe that it is as universal to the Puerto Rican student population as they make it seem. For instance, some students have English as their first language, as a result of cyclical migration or immigration from an English-speaking culture, yet they are expected to

learn Spanish without educators considering “conflict resolution” for them. It has been well documented by several autobiographers, poets, and writers (like Nicholasa Mohr, Esmeralda Santiago, and Judith Ortiz Cofer) that Puerto Rican students who return to the island after living several years in the states receive fierce rejection due to their cumbersome use of Spanish that is affected by accents, regional slang, or lack of vocabulary due to American exposure. Pastora Cafferty explains that Puerto Rican cyclical migration affects students because they are:

traveling within national boundaries between two monolingual societies...Therefore, the Puerto Rican child, who is likely to move between San Juan and New York as any other American citizen is likely to move between Albuquerque and Chicago, is forced to deal with two monolingual societies without adequate provision to make him bilingual. (144)

The ethnonational desire to maintain Puerto Rican Spanish pure from American influence is uniquely developed and promulgated due to Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship with the United States. It might be tempting to argue that if educators and curriculum collaborators continue to broadcast these ideas, the language situation in Puerto Rico might never begin to evolve into a system that promotes both English and Spanish so that they are seen not as enemies but as languages that can co-exist in harmony. The

reality is that the language debates will never resolve until there is a definitive turn away from its colonial political status. In the CS&GLE (2007) of the English program, the editors state that it is very important for both language programs to work together in order to best educate students. These language programs must change the way that they view English and Spanish, in order to facilitate a collaborative atmosphere between both languages.

The English program curriculum writers take great care in presenting English as non-threateningly as possible—which is interesting considering that their main audience is English educators. The editors continually point out that English is viewed as a threat in Puerto Rico. This was true of all English documents studied. The CF (2003) of the English program explicitly states that English “is seen as a major threat to the very core of Puerto Rico’s cultural and linguistic identity” (p. 1). The English as a threat perspective is something that Algren de Gutierrez, Robert Fife and Herschel Miguel, and Arturo Morales Carrión, among others, also point out in their studies. In the CS&GLE (2007) of the English program, the authors state that “each student should feel committed to the vernacular language, Spanish, and to his/her Hispanic culture, while simultaneously developing a high sense of solidarity, respect, and appreciation for other people and other cultures” (14). It seems as if they are constantly

reiterating this point across the English curricular documents to remind teachers why some of their students are English resistant. These reasons seem valid and perhaps are included so that the educator can use the information to consciously lessen the tension between the two languages within the classroom.

The English curricular documents tend to point towards the importance of collaboration between Spanish and English, but the Spanish program curricular documents go to great lengths to explain the importance of Spanish without mentioning English. For instance, on the first page of the SE (2000) of the Spanish program, the editors state that “la literatura lo conecta con la vida para que pueda valorar el lenguaje como la herramienta principal para su desarrollo profesional y el de la sociedad donde vive” [literature connects them to life so that they can value language as the primary tool for professional development and the society where he lives]. Arguably, the literature of all languages can enrich the lives of the speaker. Yet, by linking the Spanish language to personal development within Puerto Rican society, the curriculum authors show what they think of the English language. They also articulate that one of the goals of the program is:

Que el estudiante conozca y aprecie la literatura y el patrimonio cultural que lo identifica como puertorriqueño,

reconociendo las aportaciones de otros pueblos y culturas a nuestro desarrollo histórico, situándose, a su vez, en el contexto de un mundo diversificado culturalmente, que se orienta hacia una economía global [That the student learn about and appreciate literature like the cultural father that identifies him/her as a Puerto Rican, recognizing the contributions of other peoples and cultures to our historical development, situating it, in turn, in the context of a culturally diverse world, which is oriented towards a global economy] (5).

Noticeably absent from the above goal is that the editors fail to mention English, despite its official second-language status in Puerto Rico and importance around the world. A function of Puerto Rican colonial shame is to promote Puerto Rican, ethnonational pride to counter “American claims of Puerto Rican racial inferiority” (Negron-Muntaner, 16) by emphasizing their multiculturalism despite their colonial status.

The CF (2003) Spanish program curriculum editors make the assertion that “Los estudiantes deben entender la relación entre lengua, cultura e identidad” [The students should understand the relationship between language, culture, and identity] (47). The claim is problematic with the teaching of English because one reason English is met by strong

opposition from the general populace is because many political leaders, educators, and writers in the past tied language to the Puerto Rican identity in a way that views English as a threat. A general objective of the Spanish program as stated in the *Curricular Framework* is to “afianzar los sentimientos de amor, respeto y preservación de la lengua vernacular” [strengthen the feelings of love, respect and preservation of the vernacular language] (16). This fiercely ethno-nationalist pride fits in perfectly with the theory of colonial shame because it belittles the colonizer’s language in favor of preserving their own. The editors go on to state that, “La lengua tiene una función fundamental en el desarrollo de la identidad nacional” [Language plays a key role in the development of national identity] (46). The Spanish program’s goal of preserving Spanish and linking it with culture is also articulated in the Spanish CS&GLE (2000) when the editors state that “La enseñanza del español obliga a reconocer el papel que tiene la lengua como herramienta de conocimiento y de comunicación social y cultural” [Teaching Spanish forces recognition of the role that language has as a tool for knowledge and social and cultural communication] (1). Not only is Spanish the supreme harbinger of Puerto Rican cultural and social preservation, but it is portrayed as being vastly superior to this mission when compared to the inferior role of the English language.

The Spanish curricular documents take an assertive ethnonational stance when it comes to discussing the importance of the Spanish language with little to no regards to speakers of other languages. For example, the SE (2000) of the Spanish program states that the Spanish language is what identifies a person as being Puerto Rican. While this idea is commonly held by many in Puerto Rico, it is not an absolute truth. Many people, such as myself, consider themselves to be Puerto Rican yet prefer to speak in English. The *Standards of Excellence* (2000) of the Spanish program also states that it is important for students to be able to appreciate other cultures to match the world economy that is forming, but they fail to mention both the United States and the English language despite the ties that Puerto Rico has to them. The CF (2003) and CS&GLE (2007) of the Spanish program continue to view language, culture, and identity in a way that sees English as a threat by constantly asserting Spanish dominance and, in turn, ethnonational superiority in order to offset the shame of their current colonial status. The Spanish CF (2003) even states that one of the main goals of the program is to foster feelings of love, respect, and preservation of the Spanish language among students. I find that these attitudes are beneficial for forming patriotism and national identity, but these attitudes coupled with the movement against the teaching of English in Puerto Rico and its ambivalent colonial status

creates a stagnant environment where colonial shame remains unchanging through time (Algren de Gutierrez).

Curriculum writers of the Spanish and English programs view English through a language-as-a-problem orientation (Ruiz). They view English as a threat to the very core of their identity and they consciously or unconsciously treat English as if it were a second-class language when compared to Spanish. The language-as-a-problem orientation has become so ingrained in the Puerto Rican psyche that it seeps through the curricular documents unnoticed and unopposed. After examining the data that was uncovered by the study, several generalizations can be made with regards to how languages are viewed in Puerto Rico. The Spanish language is seen as supreme and is the language that is tied to the Puerto Rican identity (Algren de Gutierrez). Language, which became a political weapon since the turn of the 20th century, still holds political power in Puerto Rico. In fact, I would argue that the “movement against the teaching of English” as described in Algren de Gutierrez, is still strong today. The conflict between Spanish and English is demonstrated within all of the English curricular documents examined, regardless of which political party is responsible for its writing. They all wrote of English in an apologetic and secondary fashion. These authors made sure that they did not offend anyone with the way that they wrote about the English

language. Thus, despite political party affiliation, one thing is clear: all of the political parties in Puerto Rico believe strongly in the importance of Spanish. Language as discussed in the curricular documents clearly points toward an attempt to shift away from colonial shame through the promotion of Spanish as a mechanism of ethnonational pride. As Algren de Gutierrez rightly asserts, “the resolution of the status issue would solve the language problem” (146). This way of viewing language has been common since the early 1900s and will most likely continue indefinitely until Puerto Rico’s status is clearly defined.

NOTES

1. Partido Nuevo Progresista is translated as the New Progressive Party. It is one of two major political parties in Puerto Rico. Its political platform centers on building a stronger relationship with the United States through statehood.
2. Partido Popular Democrático is translated as the Popular Democratic Party. This political party seeks to maintain ties with the United States through the Estado Libre Asociado [Freely Associated State] status. Individuals affiliated with Popular Democratic political party reject attempts at statehood.

CHAPTER 4: ¡TENGO LOS NERVIOS DE PUNTA! COLONIAL SHAME
AND THE PUERTO RICAN SYNDROME

*The Puerto Rican syndrome raises issues of identity,
cultural meaning, and political behavior.*

-Patricia Gherovici 21

The Puerto Rican Syndrome is a type of culturally-specific hysteria that manifests among Puerto Ricans of all ages and backgrounds. The Puerto Rican Syndrome was first “discovered” by Army doctors and psychiatrists who treated Puerto Rican soldiers during the Korean War. I first heard about this syndrome when talking to my husband’s uncle, Steve,¹ who worked as a respiratory technician at a hospital in Puerto Rico. It was New Year’s Eve back in 2014, and the family was exchanging interesting stories that had happened to them recently. Steve knew that I was interested in learning new things about Puerto Rican culture and readily told me about a patient that had come into the hospital earlier that day. The patient showed intense distress and complained of chest pains that were so bad that they were not able to breathe. The patient was flailing about the hospital uncontrollably and failed to listen to the medical staff. Steve stated that patients with the Puerto Rican Syndrome, which he said was abbreviated to PRS (the letters are pronounced in English), were often treated at the emergency room by breathing therapy and

tranquilizers and that this was enough to placate the episode. I had never heard of this syndrome before and was excited to learn more, but as most large family gatherings work in Puerto Rico, the conversation quickly shifted to politics and scandal. The concept of the Puerto Rican Syndrome intrigued me, and I made a conscious effort to return to the subject later. Little did I know that I would have a first-hand encounter with the syndrome.

Death hits close-knit families hard. I want to keep the details to a minimum to maintain the affected people's anonymity, but I think that a first-hand account of the syndrome is beneficial to the chapter as a whole. It was summer, and I was again in Puerto Rico, but the trip was a sad one because I had a family member in the hospital. My family took turns visiting the family member at the hospital, but only two people could visit the patient's room each day for only half an hour maximum and the prognosis grew worse by the minute. Family started to arrive from the United States soon after the incident, but they were turned away by the hospital staff and were refused a visit. The hospital's strict rules led to a lot of pain within the family because they all wanted to comfort the patient during their time of need but they were turned away.

After several days of tensely waiting for the worst and hoping for the best, we finally got the news that the family member passed away. I

was very saddened by the news but behaved with restraint, which is typical of my “American” upbringing. But the scene around me was a different matter. One family members fell to the ground and started to scream and convulse on the floor in front of me. This person’s actions were so severe that they hit their head multiple times on the floor, bit their own tongue, and were foaming at the mouth. Another family member started to scream that they wanted to die and ran to the roof where they continued to cry and scream all while threatening to jump. Everyone eventually calmed down, and the experience proved to be cathartic to those involved. The family member who passed away lived in the United States for most of his life. His dream was to move back to Puerto Rico one day with his wife to live the rest of his life in the island lifestyle surrounded by family. What hurt everyone was that he had moved to Puerto Rico only fifteen days before the accident that eventually lead to his death. Even though I had heard of the Puerto Rican Syndrome briefly before, I felt unprepared to see the Puerto Rican Syndrome manifested in my family members. I felt sympathy for them, but I felt like an outsider because I acted with such restraint. This event led me to want to explore the Puerto Rican Syndrome as a Puerto Rican/ colonial phenomenon. Specifically, in this chapter, I analyze the ways that the Puerto Rican Syndrome shows up in Puerto Rican culture and examine its relationship to colonial shame.

Published scholarship on the Puerto Rican Syndrome is limited due to its discovery by military doctors who kept their findings unpublished. In other words, there are unpublished works that analyze the Puerto Rican Syndrome, but these are military in nature and difficult to find. There has only been one published book that analyzes the Puerto Rican Syndrome in depth so far, and it is called *The Puerto Rican Syndrome* by Patricia Gherovici. This syndrome also makes an appearance in editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) that have been published since the 1950s.

The Puerto Rican Syndrome is labeled as a culture-bound syndrome in the DSM-IV. The Puerto Rican Syndrome is also known as *ataque de nervios* or simply *nervios* or *ataque*². The manual states that:

Commonly reported symptoms include uncontrollable shouting, attacks of crying, trembling, heat in the chest rising into the head, and verbal or physical aggression. Dissociative experiences, seizure-like or fainting episodes, and suicidal gestures ... A general feature of an *ataque de nervios* is the sense of being out of control. *Ataques de nervios* frequently occur as a direct result of a stressful event relating to the family. People may experience amnesia for what occurred

during the ataque de nervios, but they otherwise return...to their usual level of functioning. (845)

Patricia Gherovici, who is a Lacanian analyst, explains that the Puerto Rican syndrome was first observed among Puerto Rican Korean War soldiers who were displaying hysterical symptoms in the 1950s. Hysteria is historically seen in women, and it is odd that male soldiers had these symptoms at a time when hysteria was making its way out of the DSM. Gherovici explains why she understands the Puerto Rican syndrome to be a mode of hysteria:

Their symptoms ranged from sudden outbursts of verbal hostility to destructive physical assault, from wildly infantile behavior to catatonia, from forgetfulness to suicidal gestures, from a state of frenzy to lack of interest in physical appearance, from partial loss of consciousness to seizures followed by amnesia. Although there were no specific recurrent or single symptoms found in each case, some patterns suggested serious neurological conditions. Physical examination, however, showed no sign of any organic disease.

(9)

Interestingly enough, there are no similar syndromes in the DSM manual for other countries or regions. This syndrome is solely discussed as being

Puerto Rican. In this chapter, I argue that that the Puerto Rican Syndrome constitutes a “hysteric discourse” that exposes the workings of colonial shame within Puerto Rican and American cultures. Specifically, the Puerto Rican Syndrome gives agency to people who are confronted with the realities of colonialism but who are historically discouraged from protesting this oppression. Puerto Ricans with *ataques* appear throughout the culture. Popular movies such as *El Cantante* and *Talento del Barrio* feature characters who go through an *ataque* as a result of a tragedy or in response to a difficult situation. This syndrome also makes an appearance in literature written by Puerto Ricans, such as Judith Ortiz Cofer, who weaves the syndrome into all of her fictional and autobiographical pieces. Despite the prevalence of the “classic” manifestation of Puerto Rican Syndrome, this chapter will focus on a peculiar example of it which makes an appearance in the independent film, *An American in Puerto Rico*. This particular movie is interesting because it is directed by the Puerto Rican José Sepulveda, shot in Puerto Rico, and received funding from the Puerto Rican government—yet the character who experiences an *ataque* is the white American male protagonist. *An American in Puerto Rico* explores the role of colonial shame within a colonized culture from the perspective of the colonizer. The Puerto Rican director and production team use the white American character, John, as a way to give agency to the plight of

colonized subjects. The film also highlights the problem with naming a syndrome specifically “Puerto Rican.” Arguably, anyone who is confronted with the harsh reality of colonialism could suffer from a nervous breakdown regardless of whether they are the colonizer or the colonized.

The movie begins by showing a white male American who is looking out of a window. John’s body language demonstrates that he is frightened of what he sees. Outside, the camera shows an obstructed view of a group of Puerto Rican males who are getting unknown things out of the car. The audience is not shown what those things are, or what the men are actually doing. The viewer is made to feel that the men outside are doing something illegal and possibly dangerous to the life of the American inside of the house. The scene then cuts back to the American inside the house. He comes to the conclusion that something is wrong and runs to the kitchen to grab a weapon. His weapon of choice is a large butcher knife which he takes with him as he returns to the front of the house. John opens the door abruptly and yells “Freeze!” while holding the knife up and making it clearly visible to the people outside. Then the camera pans out and shows the audience that the group of people outside is composed of men and women who are all holding harmless instruments. They are visibly startled. From the inside of the house, a Puerto Rican woman

named Carmen (his girlfriend), tells him to stop. She then explains to John that this is a *parranda*⁴.

The scene then cuts to an image of John sitting in a psychiatrist office chair. John is explaining to the psychologist what happened to him. He looks visibly shaken and disheveled; his face looks as if he has not slept in days. The Caucasian American doctor acts surprised to hear the word “parranda,” he too does not know what it means. The doctor talks about Puerto Rico in a condescending tone. He sarcastically says, “To come and play music in the middle of the night, that is a tradition?” The doctor asks, “John, how did you end up in Puerto Rico to begin with?” John replies by telling his tale throughout the movie. In the opening scene, the context of the movie is laid out. John is clearly a fish out of water in Puerto Rico. He is placed in an environment that is new to him and forced to partake in traditions that go against what he considers normal. A Puerto Rican would have recognized the *parranda* immediately after noticing the group of people outside of the house in the middle of the night.

John’s journey to Puerto Rico begins when gets called into his boss’ office and is told that he is going to be sent to the island to construct a new hotel along the coastline of Loiza⁴. John seems happy about the prospect of working on the new project. The privatization of Puerto Rico’s coastline has been in public debate since the implementation of Operation

Bootstrap. Nelson A. Denis argues that protestors have become a “symbol of an unconquered Puerto Rico.” Puerto Ricans on the island, frequently take part in large-scale protests to halt any construction developments that pose a negative impact on the local flora and fauna or take away the people’s constitutionally-protected right to enjoy the beach. John agrees to work as an instrumental team member of a construction company that, as John states later on in the film, will be met with protestors that will eventually stop the construction of the new hotel. John goes to Puerto Rico, not just as the colonizer, but also as a tool for American capitalism.

The events that unfold at the beginning of the film highlight how little John is prepared to move to the island. *An American in Puerto Rico* is a comedy. The bulk of the comic relief in the movie comes from the white Caucasian American males in the film who all speak bad Spanish or have gross misconceptions about the island. These characters often mean to say something in Spanish but they end up mispronouncing the words or saying something totally wrong, often in the form of using Spanish profanity to say simple Spanish phrases. The boss wraps up the conversation with John by testing his Spanish proficiency. He asks⁶, “John, chupame la pinga. What did I say in English?” And John replies, “Try not to get bitten by mosquitos.” The audience knows that John translated the message wrong and that neither knows what they are saying

in Spanish. Nevertheless, the boss is confident that John knows enough Spanish to be successful communicating in Puerto Rico. These characters do not place much importance to the language of the island. They believe that what they know is enough to survive and they assume that Puerto Ricans will understand them regardless because they are supposed to know English. The dysbalanced of power between the colonizers and the colonized is clear because they place little importance on the Spanish language and do not consider how Puerto Ricans feel about language.

Later, John visits his parents' home to tell them about the move. His father reacts by advising him not to trust Puerto Ricans because they "are all thieves." John takes a defensive tone and tells him not make generalizations about a whole group of people. John's mother sides with her son and attempts to defend Puerto Ricans, she tells them that Puerto Ricans cross the border illegally but they are hard workers. John corrects her and lets them know that they are American citizens—a fact which leaves his parents confused. At this, the father responds by saying, "They don't pay taxes and they live on welfare." But John corrects him again and says that "Some of them work." The mother tells John to double check his passport and make sure that it is not expired. John states that Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States and he does not need a passport to travel there. Finally, his father tells him to watch out for Puerto Rican women

because “They lock men down by getting pregnant.” This short exchange between John and his family highlight the common misconceptions that people from the United States typically have of Puerto Ricans. This is the last scene that we see of John before he moves. Up until this point, John remains positive about the prospect of moving. He defends Puerto Ricans to his family the best that he can—yet, as we see later on, he has some pre-conceived notions of Puerto Rico that will show up once he moves.

John goes through many of the same experiences that unprepared Puerto Ricans face when they move to the United States. John arrives to Puerto Rico and the audience is shown how after a day at the beach he attempts to rest at his apartment but is unable to do so because he is awoken by the sound of a coquí (pronounced kokee). On the screen a definition pops up that explains what a coqui is, “Coquí” is a “ranita autoctona de Puerto Rico la cual hace un sonido asi: [a small from local to Puerto Rico that makes a sound like this:]” and then the coqui sound is heard. The camera has a close-up of John’s face and he looks annoyed at the sound. The coquí makes different appearances in the film. In this instance, the coquí symbolizes the negative attitude that will characterize John’s first visit to the island. The coquí is an important political and cultural symbol and is the official “national” animal of Puerto Rico. Marci L. Carrasquillo explains that the coquí has become a symbol of

*puertorriqueñidad*⁶ due to its popularity in traditional folktales, music, literature, and art. According to Marci L. Carrasquillo, the *coquí* serves a nationalistic function that symbolizes how a “small and seemingly inconsequential and powerless group has the potential to direct its own destiny, emerge victorious in the face of certain defeat, and, in the process, gain a powerful voice loved and respected by all” (431). The *coquí*’s song makes John uncomfortable and starts to awaken his actual feelings about the island. The *coquí*’s battle cry initiates the transformation of John from an ordinary American unaware of the effect that his presence has on the island to an individual who is aware of his role as a colonizer.

The next scene shows John working at his new job. We learn that John’s friend at the architectural firm, José, is a fellow architect whom he helped to hire. The company only hired José because they were having a tough time getting the construction permits and felt that having a Puerto Rican would help their chances for approval. José’s presence as the token Puerto Rican in the company highlights the small ways that Puerto Ricans rebel against the United States. The American company wants to construct an exclusive hotel on a beach that is meant to be enjoyed by Puerto Ricans. The colonizers believe that they will have an easier time obtaining the permits if José takes on the active role of being the face of the company while he tries to obtain them.

The the psychologist cuts in and asks John to get to the part where he met Carmen for the first time. John tells him that Carmen is José's cousin and that he met her at a bar that he and José visited after work. He meets Carmen for the first time and is immediately attracted to her. After a brief conversation with her he says, "I hope you are not offended, but you speak really good English." Carmen is offended and responds by explaining that she grew up in the United States. He replies by stating, "Oh, I knew you were American." Carmen corrects him and says, "No, I'm Puerto Rican." He shrugs this off as an unimportant difference. This initial misunderstanding between Carmen and John is significant because it highlights the way that Carmen feels about Puerto Rico's colonial situation. She is technically an American but she rejects this label in favor of ethno-national pride which serves to off put colonial shame. John is unaware of the importance that Carmen gives to her identity. Carmen feels the need to make this distinction to preserve her status as an ethno-national citizen and avoid being labeled as an enemy/traitor within Puerto Rico, something which John cannot avoid due to his status as a white male. The exchange also highlights John's preconceived notions about the Puerto Rican people. He has difficulty understanding how a person takes pride in identifying as a Puerto Rican over identifying as an American.

I stated previously that a trope throughout the film is that John and the other Americans in the movie try to speak Spanish but end up making errors which usually results in the use of vulgar words in the place of common ones. For example, instead of saying that Carmen is beautiful he tells José that “Ella es bellaca” which literally translates to “she is horny.” When he talks to the group at the bar about the key phrases that he learned in Spanish he says⁷, “Mamame el bicho y chupame la crica.” According to Urayoán Noel, a “chaotic act of translation can be understood as an instance of the Puerto Rican ataque wherein [the] return of the violence seems the only possible defense: the ataque is the way a hysteric can send back to the Master his message in an inverted form” (125). Language is clearly a way for Puerto Ricans and Americans alike to label someone as an “other.” John’s method of dealing with the ridicule that comes from his lack of Spanish language competency is by twisting the Spanish language up so much that it becomes absurd. His mistakes initially invite ridicule but he avoids embarrassment by making the mistakes so ridiculous to where it seems as if he is not really trying. This same tactic is used by some Puerto Ricans as well when they move to the United States and do not know the language well (Noel).

The next few scenes highlight John’s discontent with the island. John is starting to feel uncomfortable with being labeled as a colonizer. No

one in the film calls him a colonizer outright, but the attitude of the Puerto Ricans in the film is decisively defensive. John has never been faced with a situation where he had to confront colonialism until his move to Puerto Rico. José and John make plans to go eat lunch with Carmen. They were just about to head out but the boss told José that he needed to stay behind and talk to him. He tells John to go out without him. At the restaurant, John does not know what to eat. He asks if Puerto Rican food is just like Mexican food. Carmen assures him that Puerto Rican cuisine is very different. He looks through the menu and tells her that he does not know what to eat because “it all looks so greasy.” Carmen, who is annoyed by this point, points out that his favorite food is burger and fries which are really greasy. I explain in Chapter 2 the significance of food for the colonized subject. By rejecting Puerto Rican food and grouping it in to a general “Latino” category, John effectively upholds the colonizer mentality that Puerto Ricans have nothing to contribute to American society. From this point of the film until he goes through an *ataque*, John will take an offensive stance on the island while the Puerto Ricans in the film will constantly defend it. Carmen, on the other hand, fiercely defends her culture even if it comes at the expense of her relationship with John. Carmen, who is a Puerto Rican that is aware of her colonial situation, strives to move away from colonial shame through her interactions with

John. If she would have accepted his comments and actions without protest, she would have accepted the shame of being a colonial subject which is not an option because all other Puerto Ricans strive to move away from it.

The film cuts back to the psychologist's office where John explains to his doctor that he tried not to say anything bad about the island while he was there. But, he claims that it was not easy. John and Carmen are then shown going to the beach. The couple is attempting to relax and have fun but John does not stop complaining about the heat and the mosquitos. The rejection of the environment is common in Puerto Ricans who move to the United States for the first time. John also seems frustrated that Carmen does not return any of his advances. Carmen states on numerous occasions that she is not "that" kind of girl. This is another tactic that Carmen uses to rid herself of colonial shame because she implies that she has higher morals than the American women that John is used to. Throughout the film, Carmen is placed in a peculiar spot because she develops romantic feelings for a person whom her society labels as the enemy. She navigates her deep ethno-national pride and her desire to purge colonial shame and her romantic relationship with the colonizer by attempting to show him that Puerto Rico is not what he perceives it to be. She is careful to make him see Puerto Rico from her perspective. His

transformation in to a “empathetic” colonizer makes their relationship acceptable in Carmen’s eyes because he will learn to see the reality of the colonial situation that plagues the island and accept her point of view, thus becoming a non-threat to her pursuit of ridding herself from colonial shame.

John’s tendency to criticize Puerto Rico is undeterred by Carmen’s influence. John is at a meeting and everyone is on time except the two Puerto Rican employees. John and his boss note that these same employees are late all of the time. This comment highlights their indifference to learning about Puerto Rican culture and their propensity to lump all Puerto Ricans into one group. When his friend finally shows up, John asks him privately why he is always late. José responds by saying that he follows “Puerto Rican” time. “Puerto Rican” time is used by all of the Puerto Rican characters in the film. “Puerto Rican” time is equivalent to being fashionably late, but the difference is that it is common to be late for everything in Puerto Rico. John is bothered by the notion of Puerto Rican time because he likes to plan out his day, unlike José who prefers to make and change plans on a whim.

John tells José that he and Carmen were going to go to visit El Morro after work but he mispronounces it as “el mojón.” This is a significant slip because El Morro is a fortress that has protected Puerto

Rico from invaders for over 400 years and has never been defeated in a naval attack. Calling the undefeated protector of the island “shit,” is an insult to Puerto Ricans who view the monument as a symbol and reminder of the defensive strength of the island. At El Morro, John asks Carmen what she thinks about the American flag. The film shows an image of the American and Puerto Rican flags together. The American flag is higher than the Puerto Rican one and appears at the forefront of the screen. Carmen responds by saying, “It’s really simple, you’re the masters and we’re the slaves. It’s that simple.” This leads to an argument where they discuss the colonial status of Puerto Rico. John and Carmen share different views on the invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States. They go back and forth a few times and, frustrated, John asks why Puerto Ricans hate America so much. At this moment, John is beginning to understand the adversarial role that has been placed on him by being a white-American male on the island. He feels as if he is being attacked because Carmen, and the other Puerto Ricans in the film, constantly point out when he is being a bigot and they do not shy away from describing the realities of colonialism to help him to understand how oppressive the situation is for Puerto Ricans. Camen explains that she is in love with him (an American) and that he cannot make generalizations about a whole

group of people. The couple recover from the argument, but John is about to face even more tough situations on the island.

Back at the psychologist's office, John states that he was ready for the most important meeting of his life—meeting Carmen's family. When he first meets Carmen's mother, he tells her that⁸ "es un placer mamarte." He meant to say that it was a pleasure to meet you. After clearing up the mix-up, they go to the backyard to meet Carmen's father. He comes to John with a bloody shirt and a machete in his hand. He talks to John seriously which scares him a bit because all the while he is sharpening the machete. He then wraps up the speech and asks John to pass the other machete to him. The second machete is even longer than the first one—it looks like a sword. The psychologist interrupts and asks John if that conversation really happened the way he described. The situation seems far-fetched to him and the psychologist admits that he has never heard something like that before. John tells the psychologist that there were a lot of things that got him mad about the island. At this point in the film, John no longer puts up any pretenses about how he feels about the island, its culture, and its people. The things that got him the most upset were how his girlfriend was always late, he did not like Puerto Rico time, he did not like how the government offices closed early, or that everything looked dirty and how the protesters were slowing down the construction of the

beachfront hotel that he was working on. John then explains to the psychologist how he and Carmen broke up. Carmen was the one to break up the relationship because she said that she was tired of John's negative attitude towards her people and her culture. John told the psychologist that he regrets that they broke up. He explains that he never knew what he had until it was gone. The psychologist reminds him that he was never going to stay in Puerto Rico, so his feelings were based on an impossible situation. John replies, "That is what I kept telling myself this whole time." John then explains how he tried to win Carmen over. These numerous attempts at reconciliation were met with failure.

The couple finally got back together on the night that John described at the beginning of the film. That night, he showed up to her house drunk at around ten in the evening. Carmen tells him that they are not getting back together but that he can sleep on her couch for the night because he is too drunk to leave. Before she goes off to sleep, he makes another attempt to re-kindle their romance and promises to her that from that moment on he is going to embrace Puerto Rican culture. She decides to give him a second chance but tells him that they will talk more about it later. At midnight, John is awoken by the sound of a coqui. The psychologist asks him if that was when the musicians came in. John confirms this. This is the moment in the film when the movie began. The

wraparound narrative serves to highlight the importance of the events that happen at the *parranda*.

During the *parranda*, John is visibly agitated. *Jíbaro* folk music and *parrandas* hold great cultural significance in Puerto Rico. The film explains that Puerto Rican *parrandas* are a tradition that started over 400 years ago when a group of *jíbaros* would visit a house at random in the middle of the night and sing traditional folk music in order to prevent crime. In a way, John created a symbolic crime by insincerely promising to accept Puerto Rican culture and change his negative attitude about the island. He made that promise to Carmen because he thought that was what she wanted to hear but he did not intend to make a true change. Noel explains that “The *jíbaro*, the native peasant of Puerto Rico’s mountainous inland, is a founding trope of modern Puerto Rican identity...the survival of the *jíbaro* becomes, like that of the American bald eagle, a political imperative, and a test of the national imagination” (122). John’s annoyance with these traditions goes against the promise that he made to Carmen a few hours ago. John goes to the kitchen to get some space but Carmen tells him to prepare drinks. He finishes the drinks but is annoyed when Carmen tells him that he needs to make more. He cannot understand how a group of people could show up to the house uninvited in the middle of the night and expect drinks and food. Carmen tells him that

he can go home, but he persists on staying there. He vents to Carmen that he is frustrated because there are people whom he doesn't know at the party, she assures him that most people are her family members and that it is normal for some guests to be new acquaintances. John goes to the living room to pass out the drinks that he prepared, but they tell him that he needs to make more. Before going back to the kitchen, John asks them if it is common to throw parties that late at night. One person says yes and starts singing folk music.

Some party goers notice that John is a little uneasy, and someone asks if he is feeling alright. John responds by saying that he has not slept well over the past few days. John asked the crowd whether or not they sleep. One of the people from the party announces that it is time to leave. John is visibly happy and relieved at hearing the news. But the guests do not leave, this was said as part of a script to prepare them for the next song,⁹ "Vámonos que la parranda se acabó," where the guests sing about pretending to leave but then coming back. The psychologist interrupts and asks if that was a joke. John replies that it was not. The film then focuses on John's face at the party, and he looks irritated with the situation and makes no attempt to keep his promise to Carmen.

John finally has an *ataque*. He screams at the guests and throws them out of the house. He is totally fed up with Puerto Rican culture. John

displays suicidal behavior, screams, and heads out of the house. He walks directly into a bad neighborhood without caring about the consequences. José, tells him to stop and persuades John to get in the car with him. John initially refuses to follow José's suggestion but eventually gets in the car. He apologizes to José for his actions and says that Puerto Rico is so different than what he is used to that he cannot stand it anymore. José said that he understood perfectly because he went through the same emotions while he was studying in the US. José's revelation proves to be an equalizer between the two. Both characters come from different backgrounds, but if they are put in a situation where they have to confront the difficult reality of colonialism, they feel uncomfortable. The "Puerto Rican" part of the Puerto Rican Syndrome is a discriminatory label because different cultures experience similar *ataques*. Mourning for a loved one who passed away manifests itself differently in different parts of the world. *An American in Puerto Rico*, however, demonstrates how *ataques* can have a different function other than showing distress. In a colonial context, these outbursts function as a way to rebel against colonialism. John was frustrated with Puerto Rican culture because it inherently felt threatened by his status as a white American male and colonizer. He was unable to properly express his emotions because he saw a conflict between what he believed to be true all his life versus the Puerto

Rican perspective. He was also temporarily immersed in a culture which would not have allowed him to express himself without the threat of self-labeling himself as an oppressive colonizer and proving everyone right. The *ataque* had to happen in order to prepare John for change.

The film then cuts back to psychologist's office. John explains that he was eventually laid off from the job because the protestors would not allow for the new hotel to be built. He knows that the session is about to expire and asks the psychologist for his opinion on everything. He replies that no one was right, there were just two people who refused to change their beliefs. The psychologist explains that it is annoying to hear a foreigner talk bad about your country all of the time even if they were right. Before hearing the psychologist's assessment of the situation, John had asked if he could come back next week. Upon hearing the psychologist, he changes his mind impulsively and decides to go back to Puerto Rico. He claims that he did not have to come back to another appointment after all. John was willing to be the one in the relationship who is willing to change. John needed to tell his story to someone like him in order to assure himself that his feelings about the situation were correct. John had never confronted the realities of colonialism before. His mind was torn between what he thought he knew about the island and what he found out once he got there. Once he realized that it was alright

for him to change his viewpoint, he was able to let go of his old inhibitions and was ready to be a part of Puerto Rican culture.

The movie ends after John returns to Puerto Rico and wins back Carmen by singing a traditional serenade dedicated to her from outside her window. Throughout the breakup, John tried numerous times to get back together with Carmen and to get physically closer to her. Carmen always met his advances with rejection. She repeated numerous times, “I am not that kind of girl.” Only when John pursued her through means that were culturally appropriate to a Puerto Rican woman was she willing to take him back. John and José eventually open up an architectural firm together, and John is presented as someone who thoroughly loves the island. He appears to be happy with the things that he is seeing/experiencing in Puerto Rico. The final line of the movie is when John goes to a restaurant, and he sees that his friends order blood sausages. John tries them, and he seems disgusted at first but eventually likes them. “They are good, they’re damn good!” The movie ends with the sound of a coqui playing in the background with folk music. These elements join together to demonstrate the authentic change that happened within John. No longer is he an outsider or someone who is viewed as a threat. John is now accepting of Puerto Rican culture.

By presenting a story about the Puerto Rican Syndrome through the eyes of a white male protagonist, the film was able to highlight the inherent racism of the diagnosis while also demonstrating the fact that colonialism affects all parties involved in a negative way. The “Puerto Rican” part of the syndrome does not affect Puerto Ricans only. Americans can also experience the syndrome when they learn about the inequalities and injustices caused by the United State’s role as a colonizer. John experiences colonial shame from the perspective of the colonizer. Even though he does not experience colonial shame from the viewpoint of the colonized, his experience is no less valid. He understands the hypocritical position that the United States is in because the United States began as a colony and is touted as being a beacon of liberty around the world, yet engages in oppressive actions such as being a colonizer. He experiences shame because he is able to uncover the oppression that is innate within all colonial contexts.

Gherovici point out that the syndrome is cathartic for all those who experience it and thus has the potential to serve as a catalyst for growth. His *ataqué* was cathartic because it initiated an authentic change within John where he began to understand the complexities of colonialism without the bias that comes with being a white American male. In other words, the liberating quality of the syndrome gave John the opportunity to

vent his frustrations in a way that eventually led to his re-evaluation about his feelings and attitudes about the island. John and Carmen's love story mirrors the relationship between Puerto Rico and colonial shame and it also mirrors the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Carmen was always defensive about the island, and she felt as if John was pressuring her to change through his constant negative remarks. The same can be said about Puerto Ricans, who we have seen in different contexts in previous chapters, that want to hold on to their traditions and not become Americanized in order to move away from the shame that comes from being a colonial citizen. Gherovici explains:

Puerto Ricans use the Word 'país,' meaning country, when they talk about the island...This creates an equivocal situation because Puerto Rico is not an independent political entity. The fact that a psychiatric 'syndrome' is called 'Puerto Rican' would suggest that nationalities are engraved in the human psyche. The Puerto Rican syndrome raises issues of identity, cultural meaning, and political behavior.

Once John agreed to embrace Puerto Rican culture, he renounced his role as the colonizer, and their status as a couple was clearly defined, the threat of assimilation passed and the couple could reconcile their relationship. It is tempting to argue that John was effectively colonized by Puerto Rico due

to the drastic transformation that undergoes his character. I would point out that even reverse colonization represents an uneven balance of power—something which John and Carmen’s relationship does not show. He was no longer in an adversarial position because he decided to live in harmony with Carmen by renouncing his intentions of making her change the way that she viewed the colonial context of the island. John was able to discover colonial oppression and no longer made excuses for it. John’s transformation from someone who is not willing to view things from another perspective to someone who has maturity and who can empathize with the oppressed allows the couple to enjoy equal footing with one another without the unbalance of power that characterizes colonial relationships. Ultimately, *An American in Puerto Rico* highlights how the status of being a colony is detrimental to all parties involved whether from the perspective of the colonizer or the colonized.

NOTES

1. The name was changed to protect their anonymity.
2. This literally translates to a nervous breakdown, nerves, or attack.
3. A parranda is an improvised surprise party that is thrown in the middle of the night and lasts until dawn. Guests play instruments and sing traditional songs.
4. Loiza is a coastal city located on Puerto Rico's northeast coast.
5. *Chupamen la pinga* translates to "suck my dick."
6. *Puertorriqueñidad* is translated to "puertoricanness" and means the love/devotion that a person has for the island, or it can be used to determine how Puerto Rican something or someone is.
7. This translates to: "suck my dick and suck my pussy."
8. This translates to: "it is a pleasure to suck you."
9. The traditional song is called "Let's Go because the Parranda is Finished." The lyrics are:

Acabamos de llegar y de pronto ya nos vamos.
[We just got here, but now we are leaving]
Nosotros te levantamos por hacerte la maldad.
[We woke you up to play a trick on you]
Vámonos, vámonos, vámonos que la parranda se acabó. (x2)
[Let's go, let's go, let's go because the parranda is finished]

Que no, que no, que no. Que no me da la gana.

[No, no, no. I don't feel like it]

Que no me voy de aquí hasta por la mañana.

[I am not leaving until the morning]

Vámonos caminando, caminando yo me voy de aquí.

[Let's go walking, I will go away walking]

Se acabó lo que se daba se acabó. X3

[It finished, what was being given out finished]

Repeat

CHAPTER 5: REGGAETÓN: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ASSUMPTIONS

*Yo no planto bandera pues yo no soy Cristóbal Colon,
yo soy de Las Acacias cien por ciento de corazón,
de ningún caserío yo me quiero hacer dueño,
no soy un extranjero soy puertorriqueño.*

*[I do not conquer with a flag because I am not Christopher Columbus,
I am from Las Acacias and have 100% heart,
I do not want to be the owner of any public housing project,
I am not a foreigner, I am Puerto Rican.]*

—Vico C “La recta final”

In these lines, Vico C, presents himself as an “authentic” Puerto Rican who has no ulterior motives and who is different from the negative stereotypes associated with reggaetón in general. I remember Puerto Rico back in summer 2004. I had just gotten my hands on the new Barrio Fino CD, and I was on my way to the local Sam’s Club in Ponce to meet Daddy Yankee. I was ecstatic on the way there and blasted the CD as loud as it could go in the car. I arrived about two hours early, and the dense line made up of equally excited fans, stretched around inside and outside the door. I never got to meet Daddy Yankee because he decided to leave (after several hours) before it was my turn. I, and the countless other fans who

left Sam's Club that day without an autograph or picture were not bitter. We played our CDs loudly on the way back home and were not ashamed to love reggaetón. Fast forward to Puerto Rico today, and while reggaetón is still fairly popular at parties or at local youth hangouts, the love for reggaetón has greatly decreased on the island. Gone are the days when people were not ashamed of liking the genre. Now, listeners of reggaetón are stereotyped as being without morals, overly sexual, and having criminal inclinations. Reggaetón is still a popular genre in the wider Latin American community, as evidenced by the numerous reggaetón artists that appear on popular TV shows, such as *Nuestra Belleza Latina*, and by the reggaetón artists who still win music awards and whose music tops the charts. Why is this acceptance of the genre by the wider Latina community not a reflection of Puerto Rican sentiments?

Reggaetón has become a widely successful genre due in large part to the efforts of Puerto Rican artists. However, its popularity within Puerto Rico has declined in recent years despite remaining popular throughout the rest of Latin America. Shame is a word that generally has negative connotations, but I have demonstrated in previous chapters that in the context of colonialism, shame can become a catalyst for change. I discussed how colonial shame functions as a tool that promotes ethnonational superiority, provides an alternative narrative to past

discourses and offers a voice to groups that are typically voiceless. I want to finish my discussion of the cultural functions of Puerto Rican colonial shame by highlighting another subversive yet empowering function of it. In this chapter, I argue that colonial shame functions as a mean to change or at least turn away from the dominant (colonial) discourse about the colonized subjects. I demonstrate this concept through a discussion of reggaetón in the Puerto Rican context.

Puerto Rican reggaetón is worthy of study as part of the hip-hop diaspora because it was originally Puerto Rican artists who put the genre on the international map (Chosen Few). Puerto Rican artists such as Don Omar and Daddy Yankee brought reggaetón to the mainland and made it popular among the Latino/a population. Early optimism for reggaetón reached its height in the mid-2000s. The hype led to talk that it could replace Spanish hip-hop and influenced the creation of many reggaetón-only radio stations and production companies both in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Reggaetón made the top of the popular playlists and artists won prestigious music awards, such as Daddy Yankee, who won the Latin Grammy, the Billboard Music Award, and the ALMA Award in 2005. Puerto Ricans were eager to be the face of a widely successful and promising new musical genre that boasted audiences from diverse cultures and social statuses. Fast forward to Puerto Rico today, and while

reggaetón is still fairly popular at parties or at local youth hangouts. I have seen firsthand how the love for reggaetón has greatly decreased on the island.

Radio stations, music videos, and elaborate concerts are just some of the ways that music is part of the burgeoning Culture Industry. With its entertaining yet innocent façade, the music industry has covertly helped shape many aspects of contemporary culture, such as fashion trends, personal identity, and even media production styles, to name a few. According to Guy Debord, spectacles refer to media events that are produced by the culture industry and are designed to influence audience behavior in order to maintain their hegemonic relationship with the ruling class. This insight facilitates the analysis of the rise and fall of reggaetón because it provides insights into how the culture industry shapes the perception of the genre among the Puerto Rican population.

The key to unraveling this peculiar phenomenon is to understand that Puerto Rican's changing acceptance of reggaetón has an adversarial relationship with the culture industry's standardization of the genre which is coupled with Puerto Rico's unique relationship with colonial shame. Raquel Z. Rivera et al. explains that reggaetón, with "Its suggestive sonic and cultural profile has animated contentious debates around issues of race, nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language" (1). While it is true

that reggaetón originally gained popularity among lower-class youth, it does not represent the characteristics of the wider audience. Much like hip-hop, which was characterized by its “blackness” but whose main audience was white suburban male teenagers (Tricia Rose), reggaetón is characterized as a lower-class Puerto Rican genre, despite its success in the general Latino market, which cuts across economic barriers.

Puerto Rican colonial shame was a key factor in the massive popularity of the reggaetón spectacle in the early 2000s. The culture industry’s one-dimensional representation of Puerto Rican reggaetón was increasingly degrading, which played a role in how Puerto Ricans viewed the genre. For the most part, the current media in Puerto Rico has distanced itself from the genre in order to disassociate itself from the negative stereotypes accompanying the spectacle of reggaetón. Frances Negron-Muntaner states that the most vital cultural productions that deal with Boricua identity openly acknowledge the wounds of colonialism. Puerto Ricans readily appropriated themselves as the original reggaetón artists in the genre’s heyday. Nonetheless reggaetón took a turn, much like hip-hop did in the nineties. Ben Agger states that “The ideological outcomes of the culture industry ... emerge ...[from] the interplay of authorial, directorial, and audience assumptions about the nature of the world” (65). Walter E. Hart expands on Agger’s idea to assert that

the effect of the culture industry's cycle of assumptions on the one-dimensional representation of hip hop music and its reflection and reinforcement of Whites' perceptions of Blacks and Black Culture ... emerges unintended through a complex cycle of assumptions between the director (culture industry), the author (hip hop artist), and the audience (White consumers). (v)

These same assumptions apply to the one-dimensional representation of reggaetón in Puerto Rico and explains its decreased popularity on the island. The difference is that instead of white culture devaluing black culture, which happens with rap, it's the colonizers who devalue the colonized culture, and the dominant discourse of the Puerto Rican reggaetón genre reinforces these negative attitudes.

Reggaetón began to fall out of favor with the wider Puerto Rican public after its boom in 2005. Critics publicly accused reggaetón of not being creative because all the songs in the genre use the same rhythmic beat, and they argued that reggaetón aggressively promoted sex, violence, and drugs, which made the genre a bad influence on the general public. These same critiques against reggaetón mirror the public discourse, which attacks the urban poor and is not based on fact. Reggaetón artists, such as Vico C, readily accept that their music was originally widely accepted by

lower class youths, but a lot of reggaetón fans come from different social classes and racial backgrounds. The desire to move away from colonial shame caused the popularity of the reggaetón spectacle to wane among Puerto Ricans because the standardization of the genre presented them unfavorably to the world arena. In other words, the desire to purge shame resulted in conscientization among the Puerto Rican people that created the agency to actively influence unfavorable public discourse through the manipulation of the Culture Industry.

For the purposes of this chapter, I divide Reggaetón into two phases: underground reggaetón and mainstream reggaetón (“Vico C Still Holds it Down”). Reggaetón is typically defined as music that has the characteristic dembow or “boom-ch-boom-chick” drum rhythm (Wayne Marshall). However, due to current trends in the expansion of the genre, it is now typically called *música urbana* and includes Spanish hip-hop music with various rhythms. I agree with the inclusive term *música urbana* because I think that a genre can have various rhythms, but for the purposes of this essay, I will refer to the collective genre of *música urbana* as reggaetón in order to stay true to the genre’s origin.

The first phase of the genre, which I call old school reggaetón, spans roughly from the early 90s to the early 2000s. According to the documentary *The Chosen Few*, reggaetón as a genre had its origin in

Panama in 1989 with artists such as El General, Nando Boom and Pocho Pan, who combined Jamaican reggae beats with Spanish lyrics. Its unique characteristic rhythm, however, became popular in the 90s and had roots in dancehall reggae, particularly with the song “Dem Bow” by Jamaican Shabba Ranks. Marshall elaborates by explaining that in reggaetón, the “features that more audibly connect dancehall reggae—most commonly and recognizably defined by its minimal 3+3+2 drum rhythms—to the harmonic and melodic conventions of the roots of reggae tradition” (135). Old school reggaetón featured dembow prominently.

According to the documentary, *The Noise* by Dj Negro, Puerto Ricans in the early 90s were eager to get new music from Panama, but they could not because communication between both countries was scarce and difficult. DJ Negro took the initiative of opening The Noise nightclub in San Juan in order to cater to the needs of the audience. He came up with the idea of taking Panamanian instrumental records and recording over them with Puerto Rican artists. This opened up the genre in Puerto Rico by allowing previously inexperienced artists to participate in the creation of reggaetón and Spanish hip hop. The resulting music became immensely popular in the underground music scene. DJ Negro became a music producer sought after by young talent, including Vico C, who became the “self-described ‘philosopher of reggaetón’” (Billows). During

this underground phase, the reggaetón genre, specifically the artists, enjoyed greater autonomy. According to Vico C, in the documentary *The Chosen Few*, the public was tired of listening to the standardized music produced for Latinos by the industry. Once they saw the realness of the underground movement, they adopted it and became loyal.

Reggaetón arrived in Puerto Rico in the early-nineties and gained popularity with artists and producers such as DJ Negro, DJ Playero, and DJ Erick in conjunction with support from major dance clubs such as The Noise in San Juan. The underground nature of reggaetón in Puerto Rico was seminal to its development. Puerto Ricans were influenced by east coast hip hop due to their political status, which gave them easy access to the music (“Reggaeton”). The distribution of the music was primarily taken up by lower and middle-class youths, who in turn supported the dance clubs that played the genre (“Reggaeton Music”). The timing of the height of genre was fortuitous because Spanish rap had become popular around the same time, with artists such as Vico C. Reggaetón began in the underground scene but eventually propelled into American popularity after its introduction to the New York, Chicago, and Miami dance clubs. Reggaetón became mainstream with N.O.R.E.’s “Oye mi canto” and Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina” in 2004.

Similar to the development of the country music genre, in the early days of reggaetón, the genre was not mediated by the Culture Industry, which led to greater creative freedom (Peterson). Underground reggaetón tracks featured creative lyrics that had a mixture of topics, including those designed to protest violence and inequality, like for example, “Mataron a un inocente” [They Killed an Innocent Person] by the duo Héctor y Tito. In the song, they appeal to the audience to stop violent crimes. The song reverses the dehumanizing tendency of street violence by providing a pathos-based description of the effects of violent acts. They remind everyone that not only is violence unnecessary, but it also affects a wide range of people and often involves innocent victims. The song features the typical dembow rhythm, but not all underground reggaeton followed the dembow pattern. Reggaetón songs produced before the massive push for commercialization that began around 2004 also featured rhythms that differed from the stereotypical “dembow” such as Vico C’s “La recta final” [The Final Stage]. Daddy Yankee’s first recorded song, “Donde mi no vengas” with DJ Playero 37 features a more traditional reggae rhythm and gained immense popularity in the underground scene.

Puerto Rican colonial shame had influence during the development of the reggaetón genre. Originally, lower class Puerto Ricans, who predominantly came from public housing projects, readily accepted the

new genre because they recognized that the music was authentic and dealt with issues they struggled with (“Hector the Father” interview in *Chosen Few*). Tego Calderon concurs and adds that people from this socio-economic area were fed up with not having representation in the media. This made them view reggaetón as a chance to enter public discourse and fight against the oppressive status quo. However, not all Puerto Ricans had this initial reaction towards reggaetón. Negron-Muntaner & Rivera explain that measures were taken to keep reggaetón off the airwaves because of its so-called corrupting influence. Politicians even attempted to take legal actions against the genre because they believed that it promoted violence and had a relationship with the drug trade.

Ethnic identification also played a role in how the upper and middle class viewed reggaetón. Historically, many Puerto Ricans, especially those in the upper and middle class, along with politicians, have attempted to whitewash themselves (Negrón-Muntaner). Several scholars have concluded that Puerto Rican attempts to identify themselves with (white) Spain is one way to differentiate themselves from the United States while also appearing desirable by negating their African influence.

Whitewashing is also evident in the 2000 census, where 80.5% of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as being white, versus only 8% that identified themselves as being black. Negron-Muntaner argues that these results

show “a clear example of how racism...informs self-identification within parameters that are different from American ones” (212). These trends in ethnic identity were initially detrimental to the acceptance of underground reggaetón in Puerto Rico. Reggaetón, with its suggestive beats and African rhythms, coupled with an association with the lower classes and its subversive nature, was difficult for many Puerto Ricans to initially accept.

A function of Puerto Rican colonial shame, which I discussed previously, is to promote Puerto Rican ethnonational pride and superiority in order to counter “American claims of Puerto Rican racial inferiority” (Negron-Muntaner, 16). Julio Morales analyzed in depth the discrimination, poor salaries, high unemployment, and generally poor living conditions faced by Puerto Ricans. He found that the negative stereotypes attributed to Puerto Rican migrants were the result of neocolonial oppression, which controlled the ideological discourse of American culture and politics during the first half-century after the American invasion. Eugene Mohr states that “among the nation’s ethnic groups they are distinguished by a long list of negatives: lowest family incomes; highest percentage of low-level jobs; and homes without breadwinners; and the highest rate of school dropouts and of deaths from homicides, accidents, drug abuse, and cirrhosis of the liver” (xi). Therefore, the initial reaction against reggaetón by middle and upper-class

Puerto Ricans was an attempt to distance themselves from the negative connotations of the genre and to make themselves appear more favorable in the media.

Puerto Rican ethnonationalism with regards to reggaetón manifested itself clearly in the period between 2003 and 2007 during the worldwide reggaetón craze. Puerto Ricans named themselves the main proponents of the genre and gave reggaetón a favored position within their culture. LeBron (2011) claims that after the decline of salsa's popularity, reggaetón's success in international music markets positioned the genre became Puerto Rico's national music, or "the new acoustic scaffolding of the nation" (222). Rivera and Negrón-Muntaner identify the public's shift in acceptance of reggaetón with the 2003 political campaigns, where

el cuerpo político cambió sutilmente de bando. Durante ese periodo, se volvió muy común ver a políticos en plena campaña bailando patitiesos en su esfuerzo por mostrarle al electorado joven que ellos estaban al día con la moda. Ya para 2007, cuando la cantante pop mexicana Paulina Rubio expresó que su sencillo de reggaetón era un tributo a Puerto Rico ya que «está claro que el reguetón es de ustedes», y nadie protestó, el escritor Juan Antonio Ramos declaró que la guerra contra el reggaetón había acabado. «Hace cinco o siete

años atrás tal afirmación habría sido tomada no solo como un lamentable desatino, sino como un monumental insulto a la dignidad del pueblo puertorriqueño», escribió Ramos sobre la afirmación de Rubio. «El éxito del reguetón es tal que se ha quedado sin detractores (...) No sería exagerado decir que hablar mal del reguetón es casi un sacrilegio. Es casi ser un mal puertorriqueño.»

[the political body subtly changed sides. During this period, it was common to see politicians in the midst of a campaign dancing stiffly in an effort to show the young voters that they were in tune with the latest trends. By 2007, when the Mexican pop singer Paulina Rubio expressed that her reggaetón single was a tribute to Puerto Rico because ‘it is clear that reggaetón belongs to you,’ and no one protested, the writer Juan Antonio Ramos declared that the war against reggaetón was finished. ‘An affirmation such as this five or seven years ago would have been received not only as a lamentable error but as a monumental insult to the dignity of the Puerto Rican people,’ wrote Ramos over Rubio’s comment. ‘The popularity of reggaetón is such that it is no longer met with critiques (...) It would not be exaggerated to

say that to talk bad about reggaetón was almost a sacrilege.

It's almost like being a Puerto Rican.'

However, the patriotic fever died down once the homogenization process was completed and Puerto Ricans began to hear the critiques against reggaetón by the media. There are numerous articles in *El Nuevo Dia* [The New Day] (the most popular newspaper on the island) that brutally attacked reggaetón. In keeping with the desire to purge colonial shame, audiences began to reject the genre because of the negative associations with it. According to Negron-Muntaner, Puerto Ricans strive to show the world how great their "country" is in order to subvert the shame of their colonialism and history of facing oppressors with passivity. The Culture Industry changed the genre, which caused the Puerto Rican population to no longer want to be associated with it.

The Culture Industry changed the nature of reggaetón and made it one-dimensional, like it did with hip-hop, as explained by Walter Hart. Instead of promoting varied lyric content and innovation, homogenization of the reggaetón genre was prescribed in order to maintain hegemony and gain corporate profits outside of the Puerto Rican diaspora. The dembow rhythm was standardized, and artists began to join major record labels such as Universal Music Group, which produced Daddy Yankee's breakthrough CD *Barrio fino* [Fancy Neighborhood]. After the

homogenizing influence of the culture industry, popular reggaetón songs promoted the stereotypical image of underprivileged Puerto Ricans who endorsed violence, were extremely sexualized and participated in illegal activities.

A cursory look at the Puerto Rican artists with the most #1 hits in the Latin Rhythm Albums Chart proves this point. Daddy Yankee in Barrio fino had hits other than “Gasolina” that portray unfavorable images of Puerto Ricans such as “Dale caliente,” which glamorizes criminal behavior, and “No me dejes solo” and “Lo que paso paso,” which refer to women in a vulgar manner. Barrio fino: En directo features the hit single “Rompe” which describes a confrontation between two drug dealers at the club. Wisin y Yandel, the reggaeton duo with the most number one singles of this category, also feature degrading stereotypes. In their albums, Pa'l mundo and Tomando el control: Live the duo sing to women in a constantly sexualized way while also glamorizing drug trafficking in their music videos, particularly for their song “El telefono.” Don Omar is also a reggaetón heavyweight, especially with the success of his albums Reggaetón Latino and King of Kings. In the song, “Reggaeton latino,” Don Omar tells a woman to let herself go and have sex with him while in “Dile” he accuses a woman of being a cheater for sleeping with him while having a boyfriend and claims that she has no excuse for her actions. He finally

implores her to sleep with him again. These themes are also repeated in his songs “Salio el sol” and “Belly danza.”

Gabriel Rossman explains that in order for songs (and new genres) to be successful, they must fit into one of the pre-established genres. Songs gained more exposure on the airwaves and enjoyed greater popularity if they fit a particular mold. He claims that “a program director or music director who is evaluating a song is evaluating it in terms of its relevance to the station’s format... Format so completely structures radio that its effects reach upstream into the music recording industry” (72). The directorial control over the production of commercialized reggaetón is unfavorable to Puerto Ricans because, as Hart describes, audiences eventually reach the point where they are “unable to separate themselves from the scripted reality of the culture industry, individuals move in tandem with the dominant ideologies that reinforce unequal social structures based on race, class, and gender” (11). Authors are removed from the pictures by big music producers and instead the directors give the audience music that caters to their already pre-established beliefs. Puerto Rico is a small island with only a few million people on the mainland. Reggaetón directors and authors who wanted to cross over from the small Puerto Rican audience had to produce songs that the wider American public could relate to. This phenomenon is not exclusively tied to

reggaetón. Hart and Rose made similar claims about the one-dimensional (and often stereotypical) representation of blacks in hip-hop.

Therefore, after reaching mainstream success on the mainland, Puerto Rican reggaetón was initially praised by Puerto Ricans as being the next mainstream representation of their ethnonational music. Puerto Rican sentiments shifted, however, after the initial reggaetón boom of the early 2000s due to the negative associations that became the standard for the genre. The genre that became a spectacle that promoted Puerto Rican ethnonational superiority became instead a hegemonic force that reinforced historically negative ideologies. This caused the function of colonial shame to shift from promoting ethnonational pride to rejecting the genre in order to turn away from the negative associations of it. Rejection is an attempt to control or at least change the dominant colonial discourse. Reggaetón's decreased popularity among the population that put it on the map demonstrates the agency created by colonial shame to actively influence unfavorable public discourse through the manipulation of the Culture Industry.

There have been several attempts by the media to explain the decline of reggaetón's popularity among the Puerto Rican population, but none of them take into consideration the effects of colonial shame. Critics attack reggaetón as promoting gang violence and drug use/distribution.

Gangsta Rap has likewise gained notoriety as being militant and promoting violence. However, Rose asserts that it is important to note that Gangsta Rap and hardcore hip-hop are styles of protest music. The topics of their songs often reflect the reality of many listeners and serve as a method of rebellion, such as Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads" which Rose explains is a song that protests racial discrimination and crack use in the black community. Reggaetón is no different. The more hardcore version of reggaetón, called *tiroreo*, contains violent images and drug references, but original reggaetón artists such as Vico C and Calle 13 used many of their lyrics as a tool against oppression. For example, Calle 13's "Intel-lú-ayala" is about political injustices during Spanish and American colonialism that remain overlooked.

Reggaetón has also been critiqued for relying too much on the repetitive dembow rhythm, which fails to invite artist creativity. On the contrary, many musical genres such as country and rock use repetitive rhythms. Dembow has also been deemed by critics as overly sexual. According to Simon Frith, ethnic music has usually endured this critique because of the difference between ethnic and Western musical styles. Traditional high music was regarded as one that did not need a physical reaction (such as in a classical music concert, where nobody moves). Music

with African beats is different because it is more rhythmic and thus promotes a physical response from the listener.

Not all reggaetón has been chastised, however. Old school reggaetón remains in high regard among Puerto Ricans, which further coincides with the public's shift in acceptance and the culture industry's influence on the genre. Currently, reggaetón sales are down among Puerto Ricans, and there is a tendency for artists to try to change reggaetón's image in order to distance themselves from the commercialized homogenous genre of the early 2000s. Music stations that once played reggaetón only re-branded themselves as música urbana and now play a mix of hip-hop and reggaetón, as well as remixed popular songs. Nevertheless, when one considers Horkheimer and Adorno's Culture Industry thesis, it becomes clear that the so-called variations within the modern manifestation of the genre are a façade and only create the illusion of choice. The evolution within the reggaetón industry is too little too late to save the genre. For example, YouTube users that publish new Puerto Rican reggaetón music videos are often met with critical comments that favor an artist's "classic" songs over new ones—which is similar to what has happened to hip-hop artists, whose underground manifestations are typically favored.

So far, I have established how colonial shame functions as a means to change or turn away from the dominant (colonial) discourse about the colonized subjects by discussing the changes in reggaetón's popularity on the island. The one-dimensional representation of the reggaetón genre reinforced negative attitudes of the colonized culture which caused the popularity of the reggaetón spectacle to wane among Puerto Ricans. Now I want to provide another brief example of how the desire to purge colonial shame is a liberating practice because it allows people to imagine a better world by subverting the negative dominant discourse about the island. I continue to use music as the basis for my analysis, but I widen my focus to two songs that present utopic presentations of the island whether it comes in the form of idyllic presentations of the past or utopic yearnings for the future. The musical presentation of Puerto Rico as a utopia directly contradicts the historically negative perceptions that the United States has of Puerto Rico and accounts to why both songs remain popular despite being composed over a century ago.

Almost every American recognizes the lines "O say, can you see?" National anthems are designed to shape and move the citizens of its countries into a patriotic fever. Many people can attest to being emotionally moved after hearing a heartfelt rendition of their national anthem regardless of what their personal convictions are. The first song

that I want to analyze is Puerto Rico's national anthem, "La Borinqueña," to examine how the utopian ideas are promulgated by the anthem which inspires both the listeners and the performers to imagine a better life. Utopian texts take a wide range of forms from novels, short stories, poems, and science fiction. It is important to note that utopian forms of expression are not limited to these forms.

There are many prominent scholars who are experts in the field of utopian studies such as Sargent, Roemer, and Viera, among others. Scholars such as these define the term *utopia* in many different ways. However, for the purposes of this essay, I borrow the definition of utopia from Ernst Bloch who wrote *The Principles of Hope* and believes that all humans are born with the innate desire to have a better life. He believes that forms of utopian expression can be found everywhere including advertisements, operas, and songs, among others. Kellner states that:

Above all, Bloch develops a philosophy of hope and the future, a dreaming forward, a projection of a vision of a future kingdom of freedom. It is his conviction that only when we project our future in the light of what is, what has been, and what could be can we engage in the creative practice that will produce a world in which we are at home and realize humanities deepest dreams... For Bloch, ideology contained

an 'anticipatory' dimension, in which its discourses, images, and figures produced utopian images of a better world (p. 2-3).

Utopias are often thought of as being unreachable, but Ernst Bloch points out that utopias are simply a desire for something better. Therefore, certain national anthems qualify as being utopian forms of expression because the utopic images that are present in the lyrics mirror the desires of the citizens for a better world despite their current circumstances. When people think of national anthems, they usually do not think that these hymns can be identified as forms of utopian expression.

The current lyrics to Puerto Rico's anthem were written by Manuel Fernandez Juncos in 1903, but it was not until 1952 that these lyrics officially became known as the anthem. The most prominent utopian imagery found in "La Borinqueña" deal with how the island has an idyllic landscape. Beautiful landscapes appear in many utopian fictions such as *Herland* whose women cultivated crops with great care in order to be both pleasing to the eye and agriculturally productive. Beautiful landscapes are also a big part of the Garden of Eden where a man was placed in a large and beautiful garden and lived in peace with all animals. Visions of luscious gardens, clear skies, and perfect beaches culminate in the proclamation that Puerto Rico is the beautiful daughter of the sea and the

sun. By focusing on the island's landscape, the anthem removes the island from its colonial context and focuses instead on the land as it was in its idyllic/pre-colonial past.

Puerto Rican audiences who listen to the national hymn would be inspired to think about how colonialism affects the island which would be in agreement of Ernst Bloch's conception of utopia. According to Bloch, Utopian artifacts such as hymns are means of inspiring people to imagine and anticipate a better world. Back when "La Borinqueña" was written Puerto Rico was in the aftermath of the industrial revolution and drastic social change (due to the American invasion in 1898) which means that "La Borinqueña" holds the same utopic ability than when it was first written, because Puerto Rico's political status has not changed. At the time that the song was written, the United States had opened many factories in Puerto Rico which caused widespread contamination which may have inspired its citizens to fear the drastic changes and the possible alteration that their island would endure. In order to combat exploitation, the constitution of Puerto Rico has a clause that explicitly protects small rural farmers while also placing strict regulations on foreign companies in order to avoid monopolies and preserve the traditional way of life and the beauty of the land.

“Preciosa” was written by Rafael Hernandez in the early 1900s and served as the unofficial anthem of Puerto Rico until 1952 when “La Borinqueña” gained official status. “Preciosa” has been interpreted by numerous Latino artists throughout the years, the most recent and popular version is by Puerto Rican singer Marc Anthony. “Preciosa” features lush landscapes and presents Puerto Rico in an idyllic light. However, “Preciosa” differs from “la Borinqueña” because it talks about Puerto Rico and its people in a subversive tone:

Preciosa te llaman los bardos
que cantan tu historia.

No importa el tirano te trate
con negra maldad.

Preciosa serás sin bandera
sin lauros, ni glorias.

Preciosa, preciosa te llaman los hijos
de la libertad.

[The bards that sing your history
call you Precious

It doesn't matter that the tyrant treats
you with black hatred

You would be precious without a flag

without laurels, or glory

Precious, Precious

the sons of liberty call you]

In the context of this song, the word “precious” is repeated throughout to cement within the listener the image of Puerto Rico as a beloved and valuable island. In the lines above, the bards call Puerto Rico precious. The bards themselves are used in “Preciosa” to raise the cachet of Puerto Rico from a small island whom only locals sing praises of to an island that has the attention and esteem of bards. The tyrant in the song is the United States who, according to the speaker, has committed gross injustices to the Island. The speaker argues that the island will be better off when it is free from colonialism even if that comes at the cost of losing prestige. The final line of the song makes a reference to the sons of liberty. This has a double meaning. On the surface, it can be used to describe anyone who wants Puerto Rico to become a free country. But for the colonizers, the final line of “Preciosa” can take on a different meaning because it alludes to the Sons of Liberty that were “a well-organized Patriot paramilitary political organization shrouded in secrecy, was established to undermine British rule in colonial America and was influential in organizing and carrying out the Boston Tea Party...” (“Sons of Liberty,” par. 1). This line is meant to make American colonizers stop to think about the irony of the political

situation in Puerto Rico. “Preciosa” is not only a song that longs for the utopian ideal of the past, but it also yearns for a future free from colonialism.

Music is an important part of any culture, and Puerto Rico is no different. These examples, however brief, demonstrate that colonial shame permeates through Puerto Rican music, and it is not just limited to the genre of reggaetón. Frith (2011) explains that “Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives” (124). The homogenizing effect of reggaetón, through the influence of the culture industry, led to a decrease in popularity among the Puerto Rican population due in part to the negative images that became associated with the genre. Puerto Rican colonial shame is a phenomenon that manifests itself by promoting a positive image of Puerto Ricans, a characteristic that is essential to understanding why increased commercialization and standardization of the genre was met with harsh critiques and the eventual decrease in reggaetón’s popularity. Negrón-Muntaner explains

“identification with Boricua stars by Puerto Ricans is as much a misrecognition of their marginal location as an articulation of a desired insider status...to the extent that stars call

attention to the ‘contributions’ of Puerto Ricans ... they also make Boricuas feel valuable—that they too have given to American culture—and hence more socially secure and less ashamed” (31).

Therefore, this trend can be categorized as thwarting the masochistic tendencies of the culture industry because the denial of reggaetón among the Puerto Rican community ultimately takes a stand against the unjust way that they are portrayed by the media.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

My goal with this project was to highlight instances where colonial shame affected Puerto Rican cultural productions. The varied nature of the chapters is meant to demonstrate how pervasive colonial shame is and how it affects almost every aspect of Puerto Rican culture including literature, education, music, and film. Understandably, Puerto Ricans want to distance themselves from the negative association of colonial shame. The previous chapters demonstrate that they accomplish this by using techniques that ultimately reflect and reposition this negative emotion. In literature, authors such as Jesús Colón and Esmeralda Santiago own up to the shame and deflect it by using humor and by creating narratives of subversion that function as the island's heroic ethnonational identity. The language debate in Puerto Rico takes a different approach to dealing with colonial shame. The curricular documents overtly promote ethno-national superiority by promoting Spanish over English with the goal of eliminating the shame that comes with being a colony. The inclusion of the American-defined Puerto Rican Syndrome in the island's literature and films demonstrate how colonial citizens find agency in a world where they have been historically silenced for so long. Puerto Rican music is also influenced by colonial shame as evidenced by the rise and fall of reggaetón as well as by the popularity of

folk music. Music is a medium that is influenced by colonial shame in that it has been used by Puerto Ricans to change or at least turn away from the dominant colonial discourse about the colonized subjects.

This study does not pretend to analyze every instance of how colonial shame affects Puerto Rican culture. A limitation of this study is that each chapter focused on an entirely different aspect of Puerto Rican culture. Therefore, each chapter had a narrow view of the object of study which could have affected my analysis. I can envision how each chapter transforms into their own books if my analysis had a wider scope. Another limitation of this study is that I did not analyze works created by people who are of Puerto Rican descent but who were born and raised in the United States. This perspective could demonstrate how colonial shame does or does not affect fully assimilated individuals.

Colonial shame has remained vastly unexplored and more work is needed by scholars in order to uncover how shame affects other aspects of Puerto Rican culture. Another direction that scholars can take is to examine whether or not colonial shame affects other colonial and postcolonial cultures. As a Latina/o scholar, I focused on the context of Puerto Rico for this dissertation. However, in conversations with Latina/o scholars who focus on other geographical areas, such as postcolonial Venezuela, we have informally discussed how colonial shame affects other

cultures. The analysis of Hawaii and Alaska and even French-speaking Louisiana might yield interesting results given their unique history with the United States.

I would like to finish my dissertation by quoting Pedro Pietri in “Puerto Rican Obituary,” “PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE// PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE//...// where beautiful people sing// and dance and work together//” (emphasis original). Puerto Ricans have a lot to offer the world but have been largely misunderstood by colonizers. My hope with this dissertation is to shed light on the intricacies of Puerto Rican culture in order to promote mutual understanding. I believe that the ambiguous political status of Puerto Rico is to blame for the pervasive effect of shame on their culture. Colonialism is archaic in our globalized world. I have every faith that the future of Puerto Rico and the United States can yield a mutually beneficial relationship if studies such as this serve to promote open dialogue that helps to tear down the barriers and stereotypes between the colonizers and the colonized.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alison Torres Ramos earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas in Arlington where she worked as a Teaching Assistant from 2012-2017. She also earned an MA in English Education from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez where she worked as a Teaching Assistant from 2010-2012. She earned a BA in Education from the University of Puerto Rico in Aguadilla. Her research interests include: Latina/o Studies, Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, Critical Theory, and Multi-Ethnic American Literature. She is currently the Productions Editor for *Fast Capitalism*. Her plans include teaching at the university level and continuing to contribute to her field with original research.