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Feminist Street Performances in Puerto Rico: Alternative Imaginaries Shifting the Ideal(ized) National Body

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Abstract

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The body of literature that documents feminist activist efforts to eradicate gender violence in Puerto Rico does not include and interpret contemporary feminist responses to heteropatriarchal narratives, such as feminist street performances. The purpose of this study is to investigate how feminist anti-violence activism exposes interconnections between gender and ongoing processes of violence in Puerto Rico through the use of feminist street performances. Specifically, I look into street performances denouncing gender-based violence and the oppression of historically marginalized communities in Puerto Rico during 2009: *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, *Ponte En Mi Falda*, and *Silueta de Mujer*. These performances were

also responding to decisions made by the governmental administration of the time and the discriminatory impact these decisions had on historically marginalized communities.

The historical and social context of these feminist street performances in Puerto Rico include: (a) a riot at the *Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres* in 2002 and (b) two “anti-violence” campaigns promoting traditional gender and family roles by former governor Luis Fortuño from 2009 to 2013. Public records are used as a source for providing the social and historical context to complement the collection of 14 oral histories of respondents that participated these street performances.

Drawing from Chicana border studies and Indigenous Pacific Island studies, this dissertation advances an island feminist perspective of two concepts: the ideal(ized) national body and alternative imaginaries. The ideal(ized) national body works as a gender paradigm intentionally inscribed on and experienced by female bodies—a body socially constructed and categorized as “female,” linked to cultural gender paradigms of womanhood and other qualities attributed to females. The alternative imaginaries generated by feminist grassroots practices, such as feminist street performances, shift heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative understandings of women’s multiple identities and experiences. By documenting feminist street performances I aim to provoke further discussions about island feminism inside and outside Puerto Rico. This study advances an interdisciplinary conversation between feminist, border, performance, body, Puerto Rican, and island studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Feminist Street Performance: Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén</i>	6
<i>Background and Context</i>	9
<i>Island Feminist Party Identifications and Dis-Identifications</i>	14
<i>Problem Statement</i>	16
<i>Statement of Purpose and Questions</i>	17
<i>Research Approach</i>	17
<i>Assumptions</i>	20
<i>The Researcher Perspective</i>	20
<i>Rationale and Significance</i>	22
CHAPTER ONE: An Island Feminist Perspective of the Construction of the Female Body in Puerto Rico	24
<i>Section One: Borders and Islands</i>	26
<i>Section Two: Levels of Operation, the Ideal(ized) National Body, and Feminist Street Performances</i>	34
<i>Conclusion</i>	45
CHAPTER TWO: The Ideal(ized) National Body Under Spanish and U.S. Domain.....	46
<i>Section One: Sexual Violence and Reproductive Control Under Spanish Domain</i>	47
<i>Section Two: The Post-emancipation Era and the Surveillance of Libertas' Bodies</i>	50
<i>Section Three: Discourses of Ideal(ized) Womanhood and Reproductive Control Under U. S. Domain</i>	54
Discourses of Ideal Womanhood	55
Reproductive Control	63

<i>Conclusion</i>	68
CHAPTER THREE: The Ideal(ized) National Body Under Neocolonial Violence	69
<i>Section One: Functions and Significance of La Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres</i>	72
<i>Section Two: The Abrupt Entrance of Pesquera to Hoist the United States Flag</i>	76
<i>Section Three: The Promesa de Hombre and Tus Valores Cuentan Initiatives</i>	81
<i>Conclusion</i>	89
CHAPTER FOUR: Feminist Street Performances as Alternative Imaginaries	93
<i>Section One: Ponte En Mi Falda</i>	95
<i>Section Two: Silueta de Mujer</i>	103
<i>Section Three: Alternative Imaginaries Shifting the Ideal(ized) National Body</i>	111
<i>Section Four: Impact and Closing Remarks About Feminist Street Performances</i>	126
CONCLUSION.....	143
References.....	149
Appendix A.....	161
Appendix B	163
Appendix C	166
Appendix D.....	169
Footnotes.....	173

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DEDICATION

To all anti-violence activists in Puerto Rico, whether they identify or not as feminists.
May your work continue and serve to rethink the meanings of hope, freedom and justice.

INTRODUCTION

As I began to work on this project, a female police officer was reported dead in the town of Patillas, Puerto Rico. Glorivee Ortiz Ramos was 34 years old and was murdered by her 35-year-old partner with her own service gun. This happened in front of Glorivee's mother, and once Glorivee was shot, the aggressor committed suicide. Various media outlets gave special attention to the fact that her partner was not the father of Glorivee's three children and that he previously had been accused of violence against other women.¹ A day after Glorivee's death, the *Procuradora*, Wanda Vázquez—head of the *Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres* (OPM),² or Women's Advocacy Office of Puerto Rico—spoke about the case in a radio interview highlighting the information previously released by media outlets.³ In the interview, Vázquez exhorted women to investigate their partners because Glorivee's murderer had been previously accused of assaulting a partner. In addition, she revealed that Glorivee had reported incidents of domestic violence with previous partners. Vázquez insisted that violence against women is preventable if women thoroughly investigate the criminal histories of their intimate partners.

This was not the first time Vázquez publicly expressed this view about the prevention of violence against women. In 2013, for example, Vázquez made public declarations that women should acquire firearms to defend themselves (Torres Figueroa, 2013). In addition, after Glorivee's murder, Vázquez sent the following message to women:

Las mujeres se tienen que preparar, se tienen que defender. Investigue quién es esa persona que quiere entrar a su casa. Si no investiga, está llevando la muerte a su casa, la agresión y el maltrato a su casa. Women have to prepare, they have to defend themselves. Find out who is that person that wants to enter to your home. If you do not investigate, you are bringing death, aggression, and maltreatment to your home.⁴ (Colón

Dávila, 2015, p. 18)

From a feminist perspective, Vázquez's statements are problematic. When addressing Glorivee's case, Vázquez generalized on issues of violence by using this as an example for the broader society to make supposedly better decisions that would prevent them from being victims of gender violence. I refer to *gender violence* as defined by international women's human rights advocate Margaret Schuler (1992), as "any act involving the use of force or coercion with an intent of perpetuating/promoting hierarchical gender relations" (p. 11). Schuler's definition points out that gender violence is manifested in various ways—psychological, physical—and at different levels of complexity—family, community, state, global.⁵ Vázquez's generalization implies Glorivee's case is not unique and does not require a careful analysis; rather, it is another number for the statistics of gender violence in the Island.⁶ As a mediator between women's issues and the government, Vázquez also failed to critique the role of the state in improving laws and prevention programs relevant to gender violence that are fundamental, not only for the welfare of women, but also for other historically marginalized groups. It is critical to avoid dominant perceptions of violence in relationships as something that is an intimate or domestic matter. If this perception predominates, then one might not think about gender violence as a public or national concern.

Both the allegations of media outlets and the statements of the *Procuradora* echo heteropatriarchal⁷ discourses that blame victims and survivors for the violence they experience. In Glorivee's case, the heteropatriarchal discourse declared her responsible for not being sufficiently cautious to avoid the events that ultimately caused her death. Once deceased, Glorivee became the object of analysis and judgment. For example, the media framework in which Glorivee was portrayed as promiscuous or involved with violent men prevailed due to

traditional views of women's roles in Puerto Rico—as mothers first, and women second—as sacrificed, nurturing, and dedicated mothers who prioritize the care of their children and homes over their own needs.⁸ These ideologies gained traction when the *Procuradora*, who represents the voice of the state, normalized violence by explicitly saying that women are negligent for not investigating the backgrounds of their partners. Within this ideological context, heteropatriarchal narratives are reproduced and imposed on the female body. This body is socially constructed and categorized as “female,” linked to cultural gender paradigms of womanhood and its related behaviors and norms.

Body studies scholar Margo Demello (2014) states, “We do not just *have* bodies; we are bodies” inscribed into a social order that classifies us through categories (such as pure and impure) and rules (gendered and racialized norms), and these are inscribed “onto the physical body” (pp. 9–11). Through this classification, also known as “social skin” (Turner, 1980), “the [female] body becomes the symbolic stage on which the dramas of society are enacted” (Demello, 2014, p. 11). For the purposes of this study, the female body is central to understanding how Puerto Rican society monitors gender paradigms—categorization of femininity and masculinity—in order to maintain a patriarchal social order. In the case of Glorivee's murder, dominant heteropatriarchal discourses depicted her as a victim of her own “bad” decisions for getting involved with a man with a violent past who also was not the father of her children. These heteropatriarchal discourses, controlled by national voices such as the media outlets and the *Procuradora*, Wanda Vázquez, publicized this case as one in which violence could have been prevented, subtly reinforcing the idealized model of womanhood by disciplining women's behaviors. Glorivee's body became the stage on which this social context was enacted.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how feminist anti-violence activism exposes interconnections between gender and the ongoing processes of violence in Puerto Rico. These processes of violence are pertinent to cases of gender-based violence like Glorivee's murder, but also to systems of power—racism, classism, sexism, etc.—within governmental and other institutions that have authority in or over the Island. I argue that these systems of power promote heteropatriarchal narratives detrimental to women. In addition, I explain how these systems of power converge with colonial⁹ hierarchical logics of morality to reproduce such violence. Specifically, I look into street performances by anti-violence activists denouncing gender-based violence, hate crimes, and the oppression of historically marginalized communities in Puerto Rico during 2009. These activists were also responding to decisions made by the governmental administration of the time and the discriminatory impact these decisions had on these communities.

By street performances, I mean the feminist expressive behaviors and actions strategically located in public byways intended for public viewing (Cohen-Cruz, 1998). While there is no universal definition of feminism, I characterize a feminist perspective as the analysis of both theory and practice seeking to eradicate all forms of social oppressions. Hence, what characterizes the street performances of this study as feminist is the activist role of the participants “in resisting oppressive gender regimes” (Aston & Case, 2007, p. 5). Another particular characteristic of these feminist street performances is that they are grassroots efforts lacking hierarchies and including multiple voices. These are also demonstrations that focus on politics of representation, women's subjectivities, and how systems of power bring violence into people's life experiences.

Like the title of this study states, I propose an examination of feminist street performances in Puerto Rico as alternative imaginaries of the *ideal(ized) national body*. By alternative imaginaries, I refer to the feminist grassroots practices that shift heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative understandings of women's multiple identities and experiences. I identify the emergence and reproduction of those heteropatriarchal narratives in what I call the ideal(ized) national body: a gender paradigm intentionally inscribed on and experienced by female bodies. I argue that in the context of Puerto Rico, this paradigm is imposed by colonial and patriarchal systems of power based on traditions that read the female body as a symbolic form of the nation—namely, the nation categorized as female, imposing core values and moral codes on the female body.

Interdisciplinary and Hispanic studies scholar Dolores Alcaide Ramirez (2011) states that a nation is a geopolitical space and an imagined community that is imposed on a heterogeneous community, seeking to create a monolithic identity. Taking into account Alcaide Ramirez's definition, a nation that is based on patriarchal standards systematically dictates gender roles and how those roles should be performed—for example, believing that a woman's primary role is to stay in the home, performing duties as a wife and mother, and ensuring “conformity and obedience to the state” (Arditti, 1999, p. 79). This description implies that womanhood is a monolithic identity that must be embodied and performed by a female body, limited to a certain space, able to reproduce, attracted only to the opposite sex, and lacking self-agency. This narrow gender paradigm is what I intend to articulate with the concept of the ideal(ized) national body throughout this study. My aim is to critique how the ideal(ized) national body is exclusionary and reproduces colonial violence, particularly against those who do not conform to the standards of this gender paradigm.

In the case of Puerto Rico—and in juxtaposition with patriarchal norms—colonial rules and imperial formations, imposed first by Spain and then by the United States, have enforced the ideal(ized) national body. In this study I am particularly compelled to analyze significant historical examples of colonial and neocolonial¹⁰ efforts to construct the ideal(ized) national body. The colonial examples include the sexual abuses and forced labor of Indigenous and African women since 1493 by Spanish colonizers, and the experimentation of birth control pills and mass sterilizations since the 1930s by the U.S. government. The contemporary examples of neocolonial efforts include the opening and administration of the OPM during the first decade of the 21st century as well as the riot in front of the doors of the OPM in 2002 led by politicians of the opposition party to the governor at the time, and former governor Luis Fortuño's establishment of two “anti-violence” campaigns that advanced traditional gender and family roles from 2009 to 2013. I depict these contemporary examples as national performances that particularly target women and replicate forms of colonial violence. The aim of this analysis is to explore how violence is entangled with the ideal(ized) national body.

The feminist street performances included in this study exemplify some of the innovative ways feminist activists denounce gender violence in Puerto Rico. The street performance *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* (or Dispossessed Muses Without Support) is an example of these practices. This was the first performance done by a feminist movement in Puerto Rico using body painting as a method of denunciation. It is also the first street performance that sparked my interest in exploring the connections between gender violence and the construction of the female body in Puerto Rico. The following is a description of this performance.

Feminist Street Performance: Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén

Everything was running as usual in the early hours of November 2, 2009, in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico.¹¹ The morning rush was evident as people drove toward their various destinations and others walked down Ponce de León Avenue. Suddenly, eight women got out of a passenger van and walked to the front doors of the *Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres* (OPM), or the Women's Advocacy Office in English. They were topless, and their upper bodies were painted in bright colors with images that illustrated different forms of violence experienced by women (Figure 1). These women were there to do a street performance titled *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*.



Figure 1. The performers of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* posing in front of the OPM. Archivo CLARIDAD, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

Silently, the eight women stood next to each other facing the avenue with their heads held high. They stood on a white sheet and were surrounded by flowers and signs on the ground that expressed their claims. One of the signs had the following written message:

Agresión sexual, ultrajada, violada, acosada, perseguida, tocada . . . ¡Sin mi permiso!

Sin fiscalización de servicios de salud. Sin programas de prevención. Con la reducción

de servicios de salud especializado. No tengo opciones. Sexual aggression, raped, violated, harassed, persecuted, touched . . . without my permission! Without oversight of health services, without prevention programs, with the reduction of specialized health services, I have no options.

Immediately, the traffic slowed down and pedestrians stopped to look at the *Musas*.¹² Only the clicks and whirs of the cameras could be heard. People started to observe the images drawn on the bodies of the *Musas* in silence, as if they were studying a piece of art. A woman stood on a corner of the street and watched the performance with tears on her face. Other people traveling on a public bus stood up to have a better look at the performance.



Figure 2. The Musas turning their backs to the street and forming the word AGRESIÓN. Archivo CLARIDAD, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

After a few minutes, the *Musas* began to turn their backs to the street to spell out the word *AGRESIÓN*, or aggression (Figure 2). As the title of this performance suggests, these *Musas* claimed to be dispossessed of the basic services that should have protected them from economic and sexual discrimination as well as health risks. Inspired by the Muses of Greek

mythology, the *Musas* each represented a specific community: victims of domestic violence, immigrants, unemployed female family providers, victims of sexual aggression, homeless women, HIV/AIDS and breast cancer survivors, and lesbians (in order as they appear in Figure 1). Other feminist activists surrounded the *Musas*, serving different roles, such as spokespersons, protectors of the perimeter of the white sheet whose role was to prevent the press or authorities from touching the *Musas*, and legal observers.

The performance lasted less than 10 minutes, which was enough time to make their claim and be seen by the public and the press, and still avoid the authorities. Certainly, the goal was not to be arrested, but since this was the first time a body painting performance like this one had happened on the Island, it was unknown how the authorities would react. The police did not arrive until some time after the *Musas* were already gone. When the police asked spokesperson and feminist lawyer Ana Irma Rivera Lassén what kind of public expression they would perform she replied, “*que íbamos a hacer, porque ya la hicimos,*” you mean that we were going to do, because we already did it (Rosario, 2009, para. 11).

Background and Context

This dissertation extends a conversation that started with my master’s thesis, *Challenges of the Third Wave: Mobilizing Young Women to the Feminist Movements in Puerto Rico*. In that thesis I began to analyze questions about the political dynamics between the state and women’s oppression. It also acknowledges that feminist movements in Puerto Rico have continued resisting patriarchy through a long history of monitoring women’s human rights. This study builds on that feminist work and centralizes their practices to eradicate gender violence.

Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén arose in the midst of an economic crisis that resulted in the approval of *Ley 7*, a law declaring a fiscal emergency in Puerto Rico. *Ley 7* provoked a mass layoff of more than 30,000 public employees, including the dismissal of many OPM employees, which caused the elimination of the OPM Legal Division (Oficina de la Procuradora, 2013). The *Musas* protested this law and its effects on the communities they represented: victims of domestic violence, immigrants, unemployed female family providers, victims of sexual aggression, homeless women, HIV/AIDS and breast cancer survivors, and lesbians. There was indignation for the lack of governmental attention given to those communities, even among those who witnessed the performance. A man named Francisco Sabina, who stopped to watch this performance, made a declaration to the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* that demonstrates that this was the prevailing sentiment among many Puerto Ricans in 2009:

[El performance] es una expresión de pueblo . . . A la verdad que estamos bien sentidos por la situación del Gobierno y las familias. No hay trabajo y eso se convierte en pelea entre los matrimonios. Hay quien los coge contra los hijos. The performance is an expression of the people . . . We are all frustrated with the situation of the government and how it is affecting families. There are no jobs and this causes fights within marriages. Some people take it out on their children. (Rosario, 2009, para. 10)

The signs displayed by the *Musas* and the word *agresión* that could be read on their backs echoed this feeling of frustration. As Mr. Sabina expressed, the *Musas* were concerned about the violence that was breaking out within families amid the economic and political turmoil. A combination of both the events mentioned previously and the conservative governmental administration of 2009 provoked the *Musas* to expose their bodies symbolically. The bodies of the *Musas* claimed to be dispossessed of basic needs such as access to health services, shelter,

and employment. The *Musas* selected the Women's Advocacy Office as the location of their performance to claim dispossession of this office's services.

In 2001, when the OPM opened its doors, it was intended to be a space of dialogue between the government and organizations to strengthen and enforce public policies that guarantee the human rights of all women and promote concrete actions to eliminate discrimination against them. The office was established through *Ley 20* of April 11, 2001, also known as the *Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres*, or Law of the Women's Advocacy Office (*Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres*, 2014). Although it was passed in 2001 this law dates back to 1995. It is the product of the analysis and proposals made by the feminist movements after attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (Rivera Lassén, 2007). The feminists who attended this conference wrote a document called "Plan de Acción para la Igualdad, el Desarrollo y la Paz de las Mujeres" that demanded an organization independent from the state¹³ addressing women's issues. They approached the candidates running for governor in the 1996 elections about including the creation of the OPM in their electoral platforms (Fernós, 2007; Rivera Lassén, 2007). That year all candidates included the OPM in their platforms (Rivera Lassén, 2007). Nevertheless, the elected governor, Pedro Roselló, did not fulfill the promise. In the elections of 2000 all candidates once again committed to creating the OPM if elected. The first female governor, Sila María Calderón, was elected that year, and in 2002 the OPM opened its doors. By 2009, when the street performance was done, the conservative rules promoted by the governmental administration in place since 2008 had affected the OPM administration and services, advocating for normative agendas based on heterosexist ideologies. I expand on this story in Chapter Four; however, in order to understand the social and political context in which *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* emerged, I provide a

few historical facts about political parties operating in Puerto Rico during the first decade of this century so that readers unfamiliar with the Island can comprehend the different political ideologies existent in Puerto Rico. It is important to emphasize that there have been other political parties with a complex history in the Island; this is a brief description for the purposes of this study.

There are three major political parties in Puerto Rico: *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD), *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP), and *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP). From 1898—when the United States invaded Puerto Rico—up until 1947, solely the U.S. military ruled the Island. In 1946 the U.S. government appointed Jesús Toribio Piñero as the first non-military Puerto Rican governor. Members of the now-disappeared Liberal and Unionist parties founded the PPD in 1938 under those colonial circumstances. Initially, the PPD advocated for the independence of Puerto Rico from the United States. By the 1940s this party had abandoned the separatist ideology and had begun to plead for the *Estado Libre Asociado* or Commonwealth in English.¹⁴ In 1947 Puerto Ricans obtained the right to vote for the Island's governor, and in 1949, the candidate of the PPD, Luis Muñoz Marín, became the first governor elected by Puerto Ricans. The U.S. government permitted the creation of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico through the Congressional bill Public Law 81-600 of July 3, 1950 (García Muñiz, 2011). The Constitution guaranteed power solely for internal governance because the United States would keep its federal power over the Island. Governor Muñoz Marín officially proclaimed that the Constitution was in effect on July 25, 1952, marking the beginning of the Commonwealth. The term *commonwealth* was interpreted differently by the authorities of both countries: For PPD followers it meant the end of the Island's colonial status, and for the United States it meant that the Island remained a colony (García Muñiz, 2011). The divergent understandings of the commonwealth status continue to be a matter of discussion.

The members of the PPD who had insisted on pursuing independence for the Island founded the PIP in 1946.¹⁵ From the 1930s up until the 1980s, the independence supporters—whether members of the PIP, the Nationalist Party, the Socialist Party, or other groups—were persecuted by members of Puerto Rican authorities and the U.S. government. These persecutions were carried out all around the Island, regardless of the fact that the independence of Puerto Rico as both an ideology and a political party was constitutionally protected. For example, in 1987 the existence of *carpetas* (or files) pertaining to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Puerto Rico was revealed. These *carpetas* contained information on thousands of individuals and organizations with the purpose “to identify pro-independence sympathizers” (Poitevin, 2000, p. 90). In 1999 the Puerto Rican government publicly apologized for the possession of the *carpetas* in alliance with the U.S. government. Although PIP members were the main focus of the *carpetas*, other groups were also targeted, such as feminists and members of labor unions (Poitevin, 2000). For decades the political persecutions included harassment, blacklisting, arrests, and preventing individuals from gaining access to employment and housing (Poitevin, 2000). One of the most unfortunate events that happened within this political climate was the murder of two young pro-independence activists in the infamous case of the *Cerro Maravilla* in 1978. Members of the police killed Carlos Enrique Soto Arriví and Arnaldo Darío Rosado Torres in a terrorist-related intervention. Investigations led by the Puerto Rican Senate in 1983 revealed that both men unjustly executed (Nelson, 1986; Malavet, 2004).

In the political spectrum, the PNP is the most right-leaning party of all. This party campaigns for the statehood of the Island. It was founded in 1967, but it was not until 1968 that it was officially registered as a party by members of the Republican Statehood Party, which

continues to exist as a sub-group of the PNP. Another wing of the PNP pursues a more liberal-democratic ideology.

*Island Feminist Party Identifications and Dis-Identifications*¹⁶

Feminists in the Island identify with any or none of the political parties described previously. In fact, sociologist Elizabeth Crespo Kebler (2001) declares that many of the feminist organizations that emerged in the late 1960s or later were created by women who could not find a space to voice their needs within the political parties with which they were affiliated (p. 48). Thus, social justice efforts by feminist movements were and continue to be disassociated from political parties. At the same time, feminists from all political ideologies participate in political and legal processes to achieve the changes they consider important, including juridical structures and functions of the state (Fernós, 2007). The OPM was one of the feminist efforts attempting to separate women's issues from all forms of partisan activity. In fact, members of various feminist movements worked directly on the writing of *Ley 20*, which created the OPM and was modified later—with more moderate leanings—and presented by Governor Calderón (see more in Chapter Three).

The intersection of the feminist agendas, the political parties, and the political status of Puerto Rico was an inevitable and inescapable reality. Various feminist scholars have written about the conflicts that emerged from this intersection. Puerto Rican feminist scholar Myrna I. Vélez Camacho (2008) explains that many feminist organizations that had been active for decades succumbed before the 1980s due to “*conflictos con la estructura política y con la ideología institucionalizada con los partidos políticos*,” conflicts with the political structure and institutionalized ideology of the political parties (p. 15). By political structure, Vélez Camacho

refers to the political dynamic that happens after each election, which operates by eliminating or following up on the governmental initiatives of the previous administration. These partisan disruptions make it difficult for feminist efforts to gain access to governmental funding in order to maintain basic services, such as women's shelters.

Other feminists argue that differences within feminist circles relevant to political ideologies also obstruct the consensus and progress of common goals. These ideological differences and the limitations involved in the Commonwealth's political status represent a challenge for the unification of feminist movements, the advancement of feminist projects, and stronger approaches to women's issues that are particular to our country's reality (Pineda, 2001; Rivera Lassén, 2007; Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). Dominican political scientist Magaly Pineda (2001), who identifies limitations of the political status in relation to feminist movements, offers one example. According to Pineda (2001), the political status of Puerto Rico has created a sense of isolation among the feminist movements of the Island because, from a political perspective, Puerto Rico is not entirely related to Latin America and the rest of the Caribbean, nor is it completely part of the United States (p. xvi). This sense of isolation¹⁷ is evident in the fact that Puerto Rico participates in international conferences as an observant country due to its non-independent political status. It is important to note that the Island has held this observant country status since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; previous to that conference Puerto Ricans had to sit in the *Tribuna* or non-governmental space at this kind of international event (Rivera Lassén, 2007). Nevertheless, these political obstacles have not stopped Puerto Rican feminists from collaborating with other feminists from the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world.

By and large, the Island's political status creates questioning spaces where gender and nation intersect, which is a minimally researched area that this study seeks to explore. One of

those spaces is the construction and abuse of the female body and its close association with colonialism. Published research such as *La Mujer en Puerto Rico: Ensayos de Investigación* edited by Yamila Azize (1987); *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1810–1920* by Eileen J. Suárez Findlay (1999); *Documentos del Feminismo en Puerto Rico: Facsímiles de la Historia* edited by Ana Irma Rivera Lassén and Elizabeth Crespo Kebler (2001); and *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico* by Ileana M. Rodríguez Silva (2012) are relevant to identifying the presence of oppression when gender, nation, and colonialism intersect. This dissertation builds upon these works and expands on feminist street performances denouncing gender violence as transcendent practices resisting both colonial and state violence.

Problem Statement

The scholarly writing that considers how the legacy of colonial thought in Puerto Rico has shaped discursive constructions of the female body is limited (Findlay, 1999; Rodríguez Silva, 2012). However, these authors do not specifically address the discursive construction of the female body. This dissertation notes the dearth of scholarship on the ways in which this construction continues to enact discursive and material violence on female bodies through heteropatriarchal narratives promoted by the state, and by the reproduction of colonial violence. Though a body of literature that identifies feminist activist efforts to eradicate gender violence in the Island exists, there is a gap in documenting and interpreting contemporary feminist responses to heteropatriarchal narratives, such as feminist street performances. Moreover, scholarship demonstrating the links between different modes of contemporary feminist responses to island-specific politics has yet to be written.

Statement of Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how feminist anti-violence activism exposes interconnections between gender and ongoing processes of violence in Puerto Rico. To do so, my study utilizes feminist practices of resistance executed in the mode of street performance as a lens through which to analyze contemporary gendered legacies of coloniality. I argue that these legacies are found in the construction of heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body in Puerto Rico. To shed light on this matter, the following questions are addressed:

1. How did colonialist thought construct controlling narratives of the female body in Puerto Rico?
2. What are past and current examples of these narratives in Puerto Rico?
3. How do these narratives enact a discursive violence on female bodies?
4. What are some examples of contemporary feminist street performances that denounce gender violence?
5. How do feminist street performances transform heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative imaginaries of the ideal(ized) national body?

Research Approach

This dissertation employs a multi-pronged approach to contemporary feminist street performances in Puerto Rico within its social and historical context. I focus on context relevant to (1) events related to the OPM, including: (a) the riot in front of the doors of the OPM in 2002 led by politicians of the opposition party to the governor at the time; and (b) two “anti-violence” campaigns promoting traditional gender and family roles by former governor Luis Fortuño from 2009 to 2013. Materials I collected to analyze these events are visual and written public records

from newspapers, governmental reports, radio interviews, televised and YouTube videos, and photographs. I selected all materials identified as pertinent using the following terms in news search engines and other social media during and after the events: “Procuradora,” “Pesquera,” “Puerto Rico,” “Tus valores cuentan,” “Promesa de hombre,” “Ponte en mi falda,” “Musas desprovistas,” “Silueta de mujer,” among other terms.

The three street performances I chose are: *Musas Desprovistas Y Sin Sostén* (Dispossessed Muses Without Support) and *Silueta de Mujer* (Silhouette of a Woman) directly related to issues of services of the OPM; the third performance is *Ponte en mi Falda* (Try on my skirt) that responded to issues of masculinities and gender-based violence. All of these street performances were done in Puerto Rico in 2009 denouncing gender-based violence and the establishment of Ley 7 that included the dismissal of thousand of women from their jobs.

A second data set was created through the collection of 14 oral histories of respondents who participated in one or more of the street performances mentioned previously. A consent form and the protocol of the meeting were sent to each interviewee prior to meeting for the oral history (See Appendix 1, 2, 3, and 4). These oral histories were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. At this point their transcription was sent to the respondents for review, correction, and reaffirmation of their choice about confidentiality of the materials. The transcriptions were coded and several recurring themes derived from these oral histories were identified and are presented throughout the dissertation as a source of commentaries, including (a) motivations to participate in the performance(s); (b) ideas and feelings to communicate via the performance(s); (c) integration of race, gender, and class; (d) impact of the performances; and (e) how respondents envisioned the future in terms of gender violence. The information obtained from the 14 respondents subsequently formed the basis for the overall interpretations of this study. Once this

manuscript was written, each respondent was sent the manuscript with the sections using their materials highlighted and only one of the respondents chose to do stylistic corrections to the material and none of them had any objection to being identified by name.

I employ a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework advanced by scholarship on Chicana Borderland, Puerto Rican, and Island theories. There are five main theorists employed in this framework: Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Pacific Island scholar Epeli Hau'ofa (1999), Puerto Rican scholar and filmmaker Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2006), feminist philosopher María Lugones (2010), and feminist sociologist Marina Karides (in press). This theoretical framework helps to focus and shape the research process—informing the methodological design and influencing the data collection—with two main goals: (1) to articulate how the study of borders delves into both past and current forms of colonialism, and how the female body maneuvers and resists oppression entwined with colonial systems of power; and (2) to propose an island feminist standpoint that consists of how border definitions of colonized islands are gendered, racialized, classed, and sustained by patriarchal codes of morality associated with the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico, and tied to women's bodies.

It is important to add that I count the respondents' activist work and philosophical understandings as theoretical and methodological contributions to this study. The description of the feminist street performances is a combination of my visual literacy—my interpretation of the images, videos, and newspaper articles—regarding the performances and the experiences the respondents shared in their oral histories. Because the oral histories provided a deeper analysis and influenced the findings of this study, my position is not as an independent researcher but as a collaborator with the respondents.

Assumptions

Based on my research experience and background, I started with four primary assumptions. First, all women do not experience gender violence in the same way. I base this assumption on the premise that systems of oppression—racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, among others—do not operate individually but in interaction with each other. Feminist studies call this theory “intersectionality.” According to U.S. feminist theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (1991), individuals’ socially defined identities are relevant to determining the privileges or lack of privileges in a patriarchal society. Therefore, the systems undergirding those identities influence how violence is experienced. Second, colonialism has targeted the female body in Puerto Rico throughout history. This assumption is guided by historical facts showing that the political status of Puerto Rico has allowed for the female body to be the subject—and sometimes object—of study and/or intervention by both Spanish and U.S. systems of power (Briggs, 2002; Findlay, 1999; Merino Falú, 2004; Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001; Rodríguez Silva, 2012). Third, neocolonialism continues to be a source of power that translates into governmental actions targeting women and other historically marginalized communities (Navarro, Sánchez, & Ali, 1999). This assumption is based on the ongoing experiences and denunciations that feminist movements have voiced publicly in Puerto Rico.

The Researcher Perspective

As a feminist multidisciplinary scholar, I have had experiences in both Puerto Rico and the United States that have been influential in expanding my interest in the topics discussed in this dissertation. One of those experiences was living during critical times in which Puerto

Ricans from all backgrounds, together with allies from around the world, pressured the U.S. Federal Government to cease live-fire practices by the U.S. Navy in the Puerto Rican island-municipality of Vieques. In 1999, a Puerto Rican U.S. Navy security guard named David Sanes Rodríguez was killed when a bomb was dropped—supposedly on the wrong target—as part of the military practices in Vieques. Sanes Rodríguez’s death inspired a number of civil disobedience campaigns in Vieques, culminating in the closure of the military base.

I began the 21st century transitioning from high school to college, which facilitated a learning process of critical thinking and activism as part of this political climate. For the first time, I was exposed to national discussions and debates about the power the United States has had over the Puerto Rican territory. My critical thinking evolved through experiences with poetry, theater, and feminism, and these experiences led me to question if the political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico was beneficial or harmful to us, the Island’s inhabitants. The feminist education I received in the Programa de Prevención de la Violencia Hacia las Mujeres, and later in the ADVANCE Program as a full-time professional, enhanced my desire to go to graduate school and explore gender and colonialism further.

In 2007 I moved out of Puerto Rico for the first time to pursue a master’s degree in women’s studies at Southern Connecticut State University. The introduction to theories by feminist U.S. women of color, in particular Chicana borderland theory, helped me articulate my theoretical questions. Therefore, the master’s work helped me to put into words the feminist critical thinking that had emerged years earlier. In order to analyze feminist movements and their history, I focused my research on the mobilization of young women through the feminist movements of Puerto Rico. The Island has always been the site of my research because it is my home country and the reality I know best, and perhaps that is the reason why I have always been

fascinated by Puerto Rico's history of colonialism and its current political relationship with the United States. It is within that analysis that I began to think about the construction of the female body beyond gender roles and patriarchy.

In 2010 I moved once again, this time to Seattle to pursue a doctoral degree in feminist studies at the University of Washington. This experience has allowed me to dedicate years of study to this topic. A combination of unique perspectives has made possible the articulation of this project: the history and groundwork of feminist movements in Puerto Rico, the profound theories of scholars in both the United States and Puerto Rico, the respondents of this study and the extraordinary labor they do, the intellectual support of my graduate committee, and the sense of connection with my history and my ancestors. All these perspectives have created a frame of reference to strengthen this study. Thus, my interest in this topic comes from very personal yet scholarly insights, making me committed to extending this critical dialogue and engaging with individuals in and outside Puerto Rico.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emanates from my desire to examine the following: gender violence in the Island, the ways feminist activists resist violence, and the creation of new initiatives to enhance women's rights. By tracing Puerto Rican feminist resistance to violence during the first decade of the 21st century, this study provides new insights within gender analysis by suggesting that the female body in Puerto Rico must be addressed as part and parcel of the structural decolonization of the Island.

This dissertation suggests that recognition of the connections between processes of violence and their impact on the female body may open dialogues between differing feminist

movements in the Island about the political status of Puerto Rico. Instead, a conversation that moves within and beyond differing political ideologies may generate spaces of possibilities and new working dynamics when addressing issues of violence against women.

CHAPTER ONE:

An Island Feminist Perspective of the Construction of the Female Body in Puerto Rico

This chapter is a theoretical exploration of the construction of the female body and its connection to colonialism. I engage in a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework that includes three main approaches: Chicana borderland, Puerto Rican “borders,” and island theories. The chapter is organized in two sections. *Section One: Borders and Islands* analyzes the work of Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa in order to examine a feminist political interpretation of borderlands under colonial rule. Anzaldúa’s theory (1987) allows me to articulate how the study of borders delves into both past and current forms of colonialism and how the female body maneuvers and resists oppressions tied to colonial systems of power. The work of Puerto Rican scholar and filmmaker Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2006) is used in this section in order to make clear the significance of Chicana borderland theory within the Puerto Rican context, as well as to illustrate how Negrón-Muntaner’s work adds theoretical and political complexity to understandings of the female body within Puerto Rico.

Chicana borderland theory has limitations when applied to the case of Puerto Rico because of the latter’s island-specific reality. At the same time, scholarship addressing an island feminist standpoint is scarce.¹⁸ Thus, I integrate an island theoretical approach that helps me move toward a borderland theory that is feminist, island, and Puerto Rican. I do this through examining Indigenous Pacific Islands scholar Epeli Hau’ofa’s (1999) work on oppressive border definitions of colonized islands of Oceania that are similar geographically and politically to Puerto Rico. I also include feminist sociologist Marina Karides’s (in press) groundbreaking work

on island feminism to propose an island feminist standpoint that consists of how border definitions of colonized islands are gendered, racialized, classed, and sustained by patriarchal codes of morality associated with the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico and tied to women's bodies.

Section Two: Levels of Operations, the Ideal(ized) National Body, and Feminist Street Performances develops an island feminist perspective taking into consideration two levels of operation proposed by Hau'ofa (1999). The first level of operation articulates how oppressive narratives of islands are reproduced, while the second level centers on ordinary people and how they challenge such narratives through everyday actions to sustain themselves and their families. In this project, I reorient these two levels so that the first is read through the ideal(ized) national body, while the second is read through alternative imaginaries. In this section, I include the work of Argentinian feminist philosopher María Lugones (2010) to look closely at the ways the female body has been constructed by colonial hierarchical systems of power that define it as inferior through the concept of *coloniality of gender*, a modern colonial gender system that categorizes femininity and masculinity. Within this level, I examine how the ideal(ized) national body reproduces heteropatriarchal narratives.

Next, I analyze feminist street performances as examples of the second level of operation. I argue that by employing street performances for the denunciation of gender-based violence in Puerto Rico, feminist activists develop alternative imaginaries of the ideal(ized) national body. As mentioned in the Introduction, alternative imaginaries are grassroots feminist practices that shift heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative understandings of women's multiple identities and experiences. Thus, through street performances, the multiple identities and experiences of the female body are recognized. I analyze two characteristics of alternative

imaginaries: embodiment and the occupation of the public space. I elaborate more on those aspects through the work of performance scholar Diana Taylor (2003) and urban ethnographer and Chicana theorist Cindy Cruz (2001). Consequently, I inquire how alternative imaginaries lead to decolonial¹⁹ possibilities, unsettling colonial definitions of the female body and enacting its emancipation. This chapter concludes with a summary of the topics discussed in order to transition into examples of the levels of operation in Chapters Two through Four.

Section One: Borders and Islands

In 1987, Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa published the groundbreaking book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In it, Anzaldúa approaches the discipline of border studies, or *estudios fronterizos*, from a Chicana feminist perspective. *Borderlands* includes essays and poetry in which Anzaldúa fuses political theory and cultural practice with her personal experiences and social identities—as a working-class lesbian Chicana woman (Hammad, 2010). The first time I read Anzaldúa’s book, I immediately began to make connections between Chicana borderland theory, the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico, and patriarchal narratives relevant to the female body in the Island. I am not implying that Chicana and Puerto Rican women’s identities and experiences are the same. Rather, Anzaldúa’s work on borderlands uncovers a line of thought that makes theorizing complex mechanisms of colonialism in Puerto Rico possible and clarifies its relevance to the construction of gender norms.

Anzaldúa (1987) claims, “I am a border woman,” and with these words she makes a political statement emphasizing the site from which she theorizes (Preface). Anzaldúa describes *la frontera* as a geographical space that divides the United States and México, a space not only

determined by its territorial limits but that also points to a history of colonization, control, and domination from which cultural borders emerge. In her words:

The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. (p. 3)

Anzaldúa particularly refers to the colonization of Texas, which was once Mexican-indigenous land. She describes the division of territories as a painful colonial imposition that continues to show its ramifications, a wound that is still open. According to Anzaldúa, the establishment of borders not only divides the land, but it also fastens systems of power and control to its inhabitants:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (p. 3; emphasis in original)

In this statement Anzaldúa provides a historical context for pondering how borders define and even shape space through the constitution of a heteropatriarchal social order, which in turn establishes who has access and who is denied entrance to that space. As an example, the dominion of Catholic dogmas demand the institution of nuclear families based on patriarchal values that assign men authority over other members of the household. European hierarchies patronize these demands to benefit androcentric, white, heterosexual, and upper-class supremacies. Those who do not comply with these standards are labeled as inferior, remaining outsiders from their own societies. Anzaldúa calls the marginalized *atravesados*, those who “go through the confines of the ‘normal,’” the “prohibited and forbidden” (p. 3). As an *atravesada*,

Anzaldúa writes from the open wound that she described, the experiences navigating prejudice on both sides of the border.

In *Borderlands*, one of Anzaldúa's most important contributions is the inclusion of the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality—among other social identities—in the study of the United States/México border. She writes about her own experiences as a Chicana lesbian Spanglish speaker, while also acknowledging cultural connections relevant to her Mexican heritage (for example, Catholicism and *indigenismo*). The discriminations she experienced based on her gender, sexuality, and ethnicity made her aware of her multiple identities, and also the multiple ways these identities are connected to social marginalization. She points out, “Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when males of all races hunt her as prey” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20). Anzaldúa explicitly critiques the sexism and racism in a culture that demands an androcentric-white-heterosexual social order, demands to which she does not conform or fit.

Through the auto-exploration of her plural self, Anzaldúa recognizes the need to reflect on her identities outside of the narrow social order (Alarcón, 1990). She begins to think through what she calls *mestizaje*, a concept that allows her to think beyond binaries to articulate a multiple-self. Anzaldúa (1987) describes the *mestiza* as one who speaks several languages, travels between more than one culture, lives “in a state of perpetual transition,” and deals with “the dilemma of the mixed breed” (p. 78). Through the theorization of the *mestiza*, Anzaldúa proposes “*la conciencia de la mestiza*,” a consciousness that transgresses established systems of thought and their dualisms (p. 80). *La conciencia* is the knowledge acquired from multicultural experiences, developing one's historical, social, and cultural awareness “of both the advantages and limitations of entrenched cultural practices” (O'Brien, 2006, p. 442). In other words, the

constant movement from one side of the border to the other—a geographical border or another form (gender, racial, and sexual borders, for example)—creates new perspectives about one’s social locations and experiences.

To what extent can Anzaldúa’s understanding of the border be applied to the case of Puerto Rico? Certainly, Anzaldúa’s borderland has its limitations in the Caribbean and requires a shift of focus to a reality more suitable to the geographical and cultural aspects of an island. Puerto Rico complicates Chicana borderland theory because it is a territory that is physically separated from the United States by an ocean, whereas the United States/México border—where this theoretical framework emerges—is made of rivers like the Río Grande and valleys. Yet México is its own sovereign state, while Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States.

Applying borderland as a theoretical concept to the analysis of borders in Puerto Rico adds an additional layer of complexity. Puerto Rican coloniality studies scholar and filmmaker Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2006) elaborates on this complexity further in her article *Bridging Islands: Gloria Anzaldúa and the Caribbean*. Negrón-Muntaner focuses on a linguistic story to illustrate the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. In a radio interview about Nuyorican poet and playwright Pedro Pietri, who passed away in 2004, Spanish language scholar Juan Duchesne said, “Pietri’s work was an example of ‘Border thinking’ or ‘Pensamiento fronterizo’” (p. 273; capitalized in the original). People began to contact Duchesne complaining about his use of the word *fronterizo*, which they interpreted to be similar in meaning to the English word *retarded* (p. 273). Duchesne explained that it is a term often used within the U.S. academy, but this did not appease the public: “Of course, it had to come from the American academy, which is imperialist and colonial, always putting us down” (p. 273). Here Negrón-Muntaner elucidates the interpretation of *fronterizo* as *retarded* to mean “not only ‘of the border’

but also ‘of borderline intelligence!’” (p. 273). This anecdote reveals that some scholars of the Island might potentially reject borderland theory. I argue that this theory enables a feminist perspective of women’s experiences in the nation, borders, and colonized spaces. The importance of this perspective is that it provides an understanding of the unique and different ways women experience oppression.

Focusing on the Caribbean and its diaspora, Negrón-Muntaner (2006) identifies various forms in which Anzaldúa’s work is helpful when thinking about Puerto Rican identities and practices within the Island and beyond. She explains that border theory can be employed:

[T]o elaborate discourses that link Hispanic Caribbean groups to other Latinos, to question the centrality of the nation-state as a unit of analysis in conceptualizing contemporary Caribbean experience, and to valorize the in-between location of the diaspora as a resource rather than a hindrance to imaging a more inclusive national community. (p. 274)

Based on this quote, border theory can be a resource in the Caribbean, an alternative imaginary of unity connecting people of the Caribbean to the rest of the Americas. This alternative imaginary is put into practice through discourses of both common experiences and differences in living near and crossing Caribbean borders. Thus, border theory allows people to question authoritarian institutions’ power over borders, their social locations in relationship to the Caribbean, and the sense of freedom depending on each person’s social location. Negrón-Muntaner offers a starting point to think through border theory in the Caribbean, but there are other Puerto Rican scholars who approach Anzaldúa’s borderland theory to analyze the intersections of nation, gender, race, and sexuality juxtaposed with the Puerto Rican experience of living in both the Island and the United States. Some of these scholars include Diana L. Vélez

(1994), Maritza Quiñones Rivera (2006), Suzanne Bost (2000), and Idsa E. Alegría Ortega (2005). The work of these theorists stimulates a transnational conversation that seriously engages Chicana and Puerto Rican border identity politics. However, these scholars' works do not emphasize the important role that colonial discourses have played in colonized islands like Puerto Rico. Hence, I proceed to address how the scrutiny of borderlands needs to be expanded in order to make sense of the island-colony reality of Puerto Rico.

In Puerto Rico, like the rest of the Americas, colonizers introduced European ideas of property ownership and other political systems that secured the theft and subsequent distribution of Indigenous people as well as the land and its borders (Alexander, 2005; Cave, 1988; Cronon & Demos, 2003; Picó, 2006; Warrior, 1995). Yet Puerto Rico's borders are defined by the ocean, not rivers, land masses, or walls as in the case of the United States/México border. Pacific Island scholar Epeli Hau'ofa (1999) contributes greatly to the identification of major strategic divisions of borders in islands.

In his essay "Our Sea of Islands," Hau'ofa claims that borders are a colonial imposition that accelerates national and economic powers and simultaneously erases Indigenous cultures and beliefs. Hau'ofa (1999) claims that prior to the arrival of colonizers, Indigenous communities of Oceania viewed the sea as a space of connection rather than isolation. In his words, Oceania was "a sea of islands," and Indigenous communities thought of themselves as "people from the sea" (p. 31). He echoes Anzaldúa in declaring that borders are colonial impositions. In fact, Anzaldúa (1987) seems to concur with Hau'ofa's argument, stating in the first pages of *Borderlands*, "The sea cannot be fenced, *el mar* does not stop at borders" (p. 3). However, Hau'ofa adds various points that distinguish colonized islands from other colonized spaces. According to Hau'ofa, European and American colonizers "drew imaginary lines across the sea,

making the colonial boundaries that confined” people from “sources of wealth and cultural enrichment.” This colonial discourse is significant because it created ideologies of boundaries that still “today define the island states and territories” (p. 31).

In the contemporary moment, Hau’ofa calls “world enlargement” the process that describes islands as “too small, too poor, and too isolated” (p. 30). It is in this way that ideologies of boundaries continue to be reproduced by dominant nations and internalized by island inhabitants. The world enlargement, says Hau’ofa, minimizes islands by positioning them “far from the centers of power.” When this minimalistic perspective is “internalized for long [periods] and transmitted across generations,” it creates a colonial confinement that is both physical—individualizing people from their communities—and mental—internalizing belittlement (Hau’ofa, 1999, p. 30). Hau’ofa’s work uncovers dominant discourses of inferiority that intend to disparage islands that are not as geographically and economically superior in comparison to other nations. These discourses are detrimental to island people. They are meticulously imposed on island cultures and systems of thought, causing island people to feel belittled. However, I argue that not all island peoples experience these discourses in the same way. Heteropatriarchal systems are also embedded in these discourses and perpetuate control over the female body. In other words, these systems socially construct and categorize what a female body is, then link it to cultural gender paradigms of womanhood and its related behaviors, norms, and other qualities attributed to females. The gendered ideology involved in these discourses of belittlement fosters ideas of inferiority associated with femininity and the female body. To unpack this complexity, I analyze Puerto Rico’s borders from an island feminist perspective.

Feminist sociologist Marina Karides (in press) defines an island feminist perspective as

focusing on:

the intellectual sensibilities of island place and constructs of gender and sexuality, positing them as intertwining forces that shape the particular conditions of economic, social, and ecological life, and the cultural and political machinations particular to islands. Island feminism also reappropriates narrow understandings of “island women,” highlighting the agency, geographical awareness, resourcefulness, and forms of community shaped by categories of islandness and marginalised by constructs of sexuality and gender. Like most feminisms it is action-oriented in pursuit of just and fair conditions for all beings, and is guided by specific interests in local and subaltern strategies that remain resistant to hegemonic discourses and practices of power. In island feminist research, a range of issues is examined in terms of culture, place and space, and identity, among them enterprises, collectives, and environmentally-attuned practices created and lived by marginalised populations in marginalised places, such as certain groups of women on certain islands.

In her research, Karides focuses on the study of island economics and economic practices in post-colonial societies from a feminist perspective. While many theorists currently speak about post-colonial politics in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico continues to be an unincorporated territory with commonwealth status. I argue that this political reality of Puerto Rico requires an island feminist perspective that addresses colonialism in the contemporary moment. Nevertheless, Karides’s work coincides with my intentions to reappropriate narrow hegemonic discourses of “island women” and highlight their agency. In this manner, Hau’ofa’s works dispute narrow definitions of islands, and Karides’s island feminism complements this analysis from a feminist perspective.

For the purposes of this study, an island feminist perspective focuses on the political and social processes specific to Puerto Rico that operate through systems of power and inequality, systematically oppressing “island women” based on their gender—and other historically marginalized groups based on other characteristics or identities. Thus, this island feminist perspective identifies how colonial discourses are not only gendered but also racialized, classist, sustained by patriarchal codes of morality associated with the history of colonialism in Puerto Rico, and tied to women’s bodies. I explore this further in this chapter, but first I first discuss the two levels of operation that Hau’ofa proposes in his work that are relevant to colonial discourses of islands and also to women.

Section Two: Levels of Operations, the Ideal(ized) National Body, and Feminist Street Performances

Hau’ofa (1999) proposes two levels of operation in the elaboration of critical thinking about Oceania. The first level is macro because it relates to the dominant discourses and decisions made by “national governments and regional and international diplomacy, in which the present and future of . . . states and territories are planned and decided on” (p. 27). From this level of operation, world enlargement narratives emerge. Such narratives predominate and serve to minimize and disempower islands and island peoples. In part, the power contained in this level of operation has to do with the authority associated with the people who executed it:

[P]oliticians, bureaucrats, statutory body officials, diplomats, the military, and the representatives of the financial and business communities, often in conjunction with donor and international lending organizations and advised by academic and consultancy experts. (Hau’ofa, 1999, p. 27)

The political and intellectual power of this level of operation makes it difficult to question or challenge the singular narrative of belittlement that is produced and reproduced by this group as the one and only truth.

The second level of operation is based on the everyday actions of ordinary people. Hau'ofa (1999) declares that, looked at from a micro perspective, this operation takes place at the grassroots level, a space often overlooked or misinterpreted by the executors of the first level of operation. It is noticeable that the second level of operation is a strategic form of social movement that navigates systems of oppression. In Hau'ofa's words, this level of operation occurs in parallel to the first level of operation due to the instability that causes the "poor flow of benefits from the top," and the "skepticism about stated policies" that "tend to plan and make decisions about their lives independently, sometimes with surprising and dramatic results that go unnoticed or ignored at the top" (p. 27). In other words, the lack of access to resources does not make ordinary people partially or even totally dependent of the first level of operation. Hau'ofa describes this level of operation as a framework that focuses on individuals and what they do to survive despite what is happening at the top. This framework takes into account multiple expressions that demonstrate that people do not necessarily comply with ideologies of boundaries and definitions of who they are as islanders. They do this through "redefining their world in accordance with their perceptions of their own interests, and of where the future lies for their children and their children's children" through everyday actions like working, immigrating in search of better opportunities, and traveling (Hau'ofa, 1999, p. 36). This level of operation provides an alternative view of islands, one that questions the power that the first level of operation has over people.

In this project, instead of concentrating on a broader understanding of these levels of

operation in islands, I shift the focus to the female body. I examine the links between the construction of the female body and the first level of operation, and between feminist street performances and the second level of operation. Similar to the ways in which colonizers established imaginary borders to enact control over islands, as Hau'ofa previously argues, the female body has been constructed under gendered processes to impersonate a desired monolithic identity of the nation. I call this construction the ideal(ized) national body, and I look at examples to identify particular ways in which colonial processes have rendered women's bodies vulnerable subjects to be abused and controlled. The first level of operation allows me to articulate this concept further, while I examine anti-violence feminist activism as an example of the second level of operation. In this sense, I present both levels of operation not as dichotomous but as parallel systems.

The ideal(ized) national body operates through moral codes that abound in a patriarchal system invested in categorizing women under dichotomous hierarchies that describe them either as valuable or not to the nation. Returning to the previous example of Glorivee's murder (discussed in the Introduction), the dominant discourse blamed her for choosing a violent partner and not prioritizing her duties as a mother. The morality embedded in this discourse implies that women who behave in the "appropriate" manner will not be subject to violence against them. The repercussion of this narrow spectrum in which women are labeled as "good" or "bad" is that womanhood is limited to what patriarchy stipulates by both categories. Inside this patriarchal ideological framework, the characteristics that constitute what is "good" or "bad" depend on women's performance and social expectations of womanhood. As a gender paradigm, the ideal(ized) national body is structured from spaces of political and economic power in order to reinforce "good" behaviors according to what the characters that dominate those spaces

understand as supportive of their vision of the world.

The historical context of these good/bad categorizations can be traced back to the colonization of the Americas. Feminist philosopher María Lugones (2010) points out that the basis of colonial modernity is “the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the nonhuman” (p. 743). This colonial logic classified Indigenous and African slaves “as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild,” while European settlers “became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason” (p. 743). Based on this logic, knowledge and social privileges were understood as natural rights for European settlers. Dominion over the land and its inhabitants was one of those privileges.

According to Lugones (2010), colonial civilizing missions were fundamental in normalizing the colonality of gender—modern colonial gender systems. The colonality of gender included the imposition of heteropatriarchal European and Christian standards of femininity and masculinity. At first, Europeans differentiated themselves through the categorization of human/non-human, as well as by gender characteristics—as men and women. Ideological conceptions of gender defined the male as the model of perfection and the female as “the inversion and deformation of the male” (p. 743). This gendered differentiation favored European masculinity over femininity in general. It also justified the judgment of the colonized, whom they viewed “as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful” (Lugones, 2010, p. 743–744). Hence, the colonality of gender dispossessed the colonized of their humanity, privileging European white, heterosexual, and upper-class social identities through violent means.

One of the aims of the civilizing mission was to have access and control of colonized

bodies and impose gender identities on colonized people (Lugones, 2010; Rodríguez Coss, 2010; Smith, 2005). However, Lugones (2010) declares that gender designation was derived from the European normative understanding of masculinity and femininity. This means that if European males represented human masculinity, colonized males “became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women” (p. 744). The hierarchical organization of the coloniality of gender positioned European males at the top, as the ideal agents of colonized nations. European females followed, classified as inferior to European males, and colonized males and females were at the bottom of this social hierarchy. Lugones argues there was little hierarchical difference among the colonized, because females were treated the same as colonized males, while colonized males were correlated to femininity as “a gesture of humiliation, attributing to them sexual passivity under the threat of rape” (p. 744). This categorization intentionally assigned them an inferior social status.

Christianity was fundamental in defining gender as a natural human identity and not a social construction. Indeed, Lugones (2010) explains that Christianity was the most powerful instrument for the normalization of gender as understood by colonizers. The moral code of the Christian tradition subjected the colonized female body to an extra layer of inferiority and abuse. For example, Lugones mentions that “Christian confession, sin, and the Manichean division between good and evil served to imprint female sexuality as evil, as colonized females were understood in relation to Satan, sometimes as mounted by Satan” (p. 745). This statement suggests the fundamental role Christianity played in the surveillance of the colonized female body.

The historical context of the coloniality of gender reveals how the female body has been a key site for imagining the nation. Not only did colonizers impose European ideological

conceptions of womanhood as the standard for all females, but they also policed the colonized body in order to make it impossible for it to fulfill the demands of ideal womanhood. If the standard of the ideal personification of womanhood was a European, white, and upper-class female, then the colonized female had no chance to fulfill such demands. Hence, the colonized nation was imagined as a location of European supremacy where ideological conceptions of gender prevailed for “good” women to be the model of the nation: the ideal(ized) national body. According to Lugones’s (2010) theory, the colonized female body remained controlled by colonial rules. Classifying this body as evil and inferior allowed the justification of sexual violence—and other forms of violence like forced labor—to be used as a weapon of terror (Lugones, 2010; Smith, 2005; Sued-Badillo, 2002). Dispossessing the colonized female body of its humanity and later defining it as shameful and dirty enabled the ideal(ized) national body to be established and normalized.

At the first level of operation, centers of power have put great effort into reproducing and maintaining these narrow gendered ideologies. While it might seem to be something that belongs to the past, Lugones (2010) confirms that “the coloniality of gender is still with us” and it exists in spaces where “the capitalist world system of power” prevails (p. 746). One way to continue reproducing these gendered ideologies is through the social value that is placed on patriarchal traditions—gendered customs and beliefs privileging males over females. In Glorivee’s case, for example, her body became an object of analysis and judgment even after being murdered. The dominant narratives of this case demonstrate how patriarchal traditions “limited constructs of female value” (Schmidt Camacho, 2005, p. 271). Transnational migration scholar Alicia Schmidt Camacho (2005) explains that this judgment is part of “systematic forms of repression that appropriates women’s bodies for profit, governance, and social regulation” (p. 271). These

systematic forms of repression allow the production of “a female subject” with minimal or no agency, preventing women from acting “as agents of their own narrative of wounding and retribution” and “suppressing the victim’s political rights at the hands of the state” (Schmidt Camacho, 2005, p. 271). In Glorivee’s case, we can see how she was systematically and violently deprived of any bodily agency, first by her murderer and later by the heteropatriarchal discourses around the case.

I analyze feminist street performances that denounce gender violence in Puerto Rico as an example of Hau’ofa’s second level of operation, which I interpret as alternative imaginaries. As such, I analyze feminist street performances as grassroots practices shifting heteropatriarchal narratives of the ideal(ized) national body into alternative expressions and meanings of the female body. I look into two aspects of feminist street performances as alternative imaginaries: embodiment and the occupation of space.

Embodiment, in this study, is the experience of the body when used as a tool of feminist praxis—theory and practice. These experiences are unique in the way they are performed and experienced. For example, in the street performance *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, each body is painted in different colors, with different images, and representing a specific community (see Figure 1). This recognition of differences is important in order to examine the visual awareness of diversity that the *Musas* expose through their bodies and how feminist activists themselves experience embodiment in different ways—all discussed in Chapter Four.

Embodiment recontextualizes the female body as a site of knowledge production and agency. Several scholars acknowledge the epistemology (ways of knowing) of the body. Taylor (2003) argues, “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action” (p. xvi). In the same way, urban ethnographer and Chicana feminist Cindy Cruz (2001) emphasizes that an “embodied

practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing” (p. 3). The epistemological capacity of embodiment provides a critical perspective of the self that allows space for re-invention, especially for the marginalized body. In the words of Cruz (2001), the epistemology of the body recontextualizes and re-imagines “the histories and forms of agencies of women who are unrepresented and unheard” (p. 663). I investigate how embodiment remakes “a new form of identity/body . . . that is ground in the interrogation of its positionality, a specificity of history and location” for feminist activists denouncing gender-based violence through street performances (Cruz, 2001, p. 663). While going through this transformative process, feminist activists become agents, witnesses, and provocateurs through both the politics they denounce and the narratives they embody (Cruz, 2001). In this way, I examine how embodiment is a feminist praxis that makes visible the complexity of the political moment, voices unheard or untold stories, and produces alternative ways to think about the female body and its agency.

Through embodiment feminist activists also intervene in the space they occupy during the street performance, which is a colonized space where traditional understandings of the ideal(ized) national body predominate. The feminist street performances included in this project interrupted public spaces with images out of the ordinary and provoked discussions among those who witnessed the performances. In *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, feminist activists stood on a white sheet in front of the OPM to denounce the dispossession of basic services and jobs, and the underrepresentation of the communities they embodied in the performance. In their oral histories respondents emphasized the white sheet serving as a perimeter to deter journalists and passersby from touching the *Musas*. From an artistic perspective, the white sheet also served as a symbolic stage of denunciation where signs and flowers surrounded the *Musas*.

For the *Musas*, occupying the street was an act of reclaiming the space of the Women's Advocacy Office. In the words of respondent Zulnette García:

*[El performance] era un acto de reclamar el espacio de las mujeres, la Procuradora de las Mujeres era nuestra, era, porque ya yo siento que yo la perdí hace tiempo (ríe). Pero la Procuradora, la Oficina de la Procuradora era nuestra y nos las quitaron y yo creo que el hacerlo ahí [el performance] era un reclamo de que nos quitaron ese espacio. ¿Dónde está la Procuradora cuando tenemos mujeres, una cantidad de mujeres absurda despedidas por la Ley 7? [The performance] was an act of reclaiming the space of women, the Women's Advocacy Office was ours, it was, because I feel that I lost it a long time ago (laughs). But the *Procuradora*, the Women's Advocacy Office was ours and they took it from us, and I believe that doing the performance there was a claim that they took away that space. Where is the *Procuradora* when we have an absurd number of women dismissed by *Ley 7*? (personal communication, September 7, 2013)*

In this statement, García refers to the OPM as a space that used to be welcoming, a place where she belonged. When she says that the OPM “was ours,” she talks in a general way, including the feminists who participated in the performance as well as the women whom she felt were left out by the conservative politics of the moment. García also claims the silence of the *Procuradora* was detrimental to women's welfare given the fact that most of the people dismissed by *Ley 7* were single women heads of families (Del Mar Quiles, 2015; Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico, 2009; Toro, 2010). She identifies the silence of the *Procuradora* as a form of collaboration with the State in dispossessing women from their jobs and their safety, leaving them symbolically undressed, without support.

Reclamation, according to Cruz (2001), is not only a social strategy of visibility but also

“the struggle to develop a critical practice that can propel the [female] body from a neocolonial past . . . into the embodiments of radical subjectivities” (p. 658). The *Musas* presented both the images of the violences they denounced individually and the collective image they created as a group, symbolizing their struggle to eradicate gender-based violence. The individual images remind us there are many forms of violence and every person experiences these violences differently. The collective image reminds us that women are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence. Accordingly, the *Musas* reclaim the space of the OPM and the public space to make passersby witnesses of these violences that are everywhere, including in the street. One of the respondents, Teresa Córdova Rodríguez, states:

[La violencia] está ahí en nuestras caras, en la calle, precisamente. Al igual que el performance estaba ahí en la calle, ¿es que está ahí y no lo estamos viendo, tú sabes! Está en, en, mi vecina lo vive, mi prima lo vive, en pequeñas cosas que se viven todos los días. Violence is there in our faces, on the street precisely. In the same way that the performance was there on the street, it is there and we are not seeing it, you know! My neighbor lives it, my cousin lives it, and it is in small things that one lives every day.

This statement suggests that doing the performance in the street is intentional. It is a call for several audiences—passersby, newspaper readers, TV news, the government, authorities, etc.—to see the many manifestations of violence and the work of those helping to eradicate it. Taking into account that one of the main endeavors of the ideal(ized) national body is to regulate the public space, the sudden presence of the *Musas* in the street immediately makes a spatial alteration. The street performance becomes a tool that intervenes in the space almost as a surprising act, producing an unusual image that the passersby do not expect and, thus, creating an alternative imaginary of space.

Looked at from an island feminist perspective, alternative imaginaries of the ideal(ized) national body are decolonial possibilities. Feminist activists engage with decolonial possibilities through their performative practices that undo colonial logics of the female body. We see how feminist activists, for example, displayed their half-naked and painted bodies to the public in *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* as an act to denunciate dispossession. As shown previously, Anzaldúa, Hau'ofa, and Lugones consistently claim that the colonized have been historically linked to inferiority and policed by European and North American religious moral judgment. Lugones, in particular, highlights the degrading associations of the colonized female body with malevolent and perverse attributes.

Theoretically, the *Musas* not only are performing a political action at a local-governmental level when displaying their bodies in public, but they are also using their bodies to speak out from the ground. The ground is a colonized territory where nudity is not acceptable according to patriarchal and religious moral standards. Sociologist and Puerto Rican feminist Shariana Ferrer Núñez wrote in 2014:

Reconocer el cuerpo como territorio de derechos y asumirse soberana del mismo resulta en una compleja concepción descolonizadora. To recognize the body as a territory of rights and to claim being sovereign results in a complex conception of decolonization (para. 9).

From this perspective, the body becomes a political site that advocates for its emancipation—divesting the body from colonial and heteropatriarchal logics. In this way, the intervention of the body in the public space dismantles the oppressive discourses forged by the ideal(ized) national body. Overall, the second level of operation that Hau'ofa proposes has to do with the ways ordinary people unsettle the norm. An analysis of street performances that denounce gender

violence is a method that brings to light how feminist activists practice this level of operation in Puerto Rico. I focus on the epistemological potential of street performances and how such a method challenges standards of the ideal(ized) national body.

Conclusion

The theoretical contributions of borderland and island studies presented in this chapter ground the ways in which this research project addresses colonial legacies that construct the female body in Puerto Rico. An island feminist perspective provides an understanding of colonial, political, and social processes specific to islands systematically targeting women. Following Hau'ofa's levels of operation, and in the context of Puerto Rico, I identify what I call the ideal(ized) national body as a gender paradigm that classifies the female body as inferior and continues to subject it to colonial and heteropatriarchal standards of womanhood. Parallel to this level of operation, I explore how anti-violence feminist activism—as seen in street performance as a tool of political protest—can be read as alternative imaginaries shifting the ideal(ized) national body. This level of operation shifts traditional narratives of the female body to a plural perspective with multiple identities and experiences. Moreover, I recognize alternative imaginaries as decolonial possibilities to think about the female body beyond colonial definitions. In order to understand this theoretical framework further, the next three chapters examine both levels of operation in the context of Puerto Rico. These chapters address colonial and neocolonial iterations that define, regulate, and systematically abuse women through the construction of an ideal(ized) national body. Equally important, I analyze other examples of feminist street performances to provide further insights regarding alternative imaginaries of the ideal(ized) national body.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Ideal(ized) National Body Under Spanish and U.S. Domain

In the previous chapter I presented the ideal(ized) national body as a first level of operation and defined it as a gender paradigm intentionally inscribed on the female body to be read as a symbolic form of the nation. The aim of this chapter is to explore historical processes and discourses that I identify as examples of the ideal(ized) national body during Spanish (1493–1898) and U.S. colonialism (since 1898) in Puerto Rico. My intention is to demonstrate how the female body has been targeted as part of colonial projects and formations through various forms of systemic violence.

This chapter has three sections. *Section One: Sexual Violence and Reproductive Control Under Spanish Domain* includes the abuses that Indigenous²⁰ and African women's bodies endured during Spanish rule. In *Section Two: The Post-emancipation Era and the Surveillance of Libertas' Bodies*, I describe anti-concubinage campaigns that targeted female former slaves, or *libertas*, through surveillance by Spanish authorities. *Section Three: Discourses of Ideal(ized) Womanhood and Reproductive Control Under U.S. Domain* explains the changes and continuities of gendered mainstream discourses about womanhood, including policies pertinent to sexual and reproductive control practiced by the United States in collaboration with the Puerto Rican government, such as the experimentation with birth control pills and mass sterilizations from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Although these sections have a chronological order, this chapter does not cover the many ways in which the female body has been targeted by colonial rules. Rather, each section focuses on colonial processes that I identify and interpret as examples of the construction of an

ideal(ized) national body in Puerto Rico. I combine a description of these processes with examples of discourses written by Puerto Rican intellectuals from different time periods.

As a first level of operation, and for the purposes of this study, the ideal(ized) national body is constructed to be the one and only model of womanhood. The fewer similarities a female body has to the ideal(ized) national body, the more likely this body is to be precarious, vulnerable, pathologized, and treated as property (Ferrer Núñez, 2014). Thus, those processes have also enabled the political conditions, reforms, and policies that shape, standardize, and even legalize practices of belittlement that I further explore in this chapter. I conclude with a summary of the main points this chapter covers in order to transition to the next chapter's examples of neocolonial processes.

Section One: Sexual Violence and Reproductive Control Under Spanish Domain

Prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, gender dynamics between Indigenous people were based on a division of labor and cultural strategies for tribal survival (Picó, 2006; Sued Badillo, 2011). As explored in Chapter One, European colonizers introduced systems of classification that categorized islands and Indigenous people as inferior to them. In Chapter One, for example, I highlight the work of Epeli Hau'ofa (1999), who claims that colonizers defined borders in order to take control of both the land and the resources of Indigenous communities. Moreover, María Lugones (2010) explains how these systems of classification treated Indigenous men and women as subaltern subjects through the coloniality of gender, a system based on gender hierarchies that positioned Indigenous men as inferior to European men and women, and Indigenous women at the bottom of this hierarchy (as explained in Chapter One). Lugones also highlights how civilizing Christian missionaries exercised control

of the female body by categorizing femininity as evil and sinful. These theories set a basis to think about how the colonization of the land also meant ownership of its inhabitants' bodies.

Historical accounts of the violence that Indigenous and African women endured as slaves serve as evidence that women were targets of the colonial project based on the domination of these particular communities (Lugones 2007; Lugones, 2010; Sued Badillo, 2002). The theft of the land began with mass rape, causing havoc on the welfare of Indigenous women. This form of violence was a specific way for colonizers to employ power over female bodies (Smith, 2005). Placing Indigenous women at the bottom of the social stratification enabled colonizers to justify their “right” to have access to the female body, making this body “undeserving of integrity and violable at all times” (Smith & Ross, 2004, para. 1). The violence involved in this colonial process exemplifies how colonialism shaped initial social constructions of gender in Puerto Rico.

Race is an important social element in the equation of Indigenous women's oppression. According to Lugones (2010), racial differentiation played an important role in degrading the Indigenous female body. She states that while the European bourgeois man was meant to be the privileged subject/agent within colonial heteropatriarchal hierarchies, the European bourgeois woman was not understood as the male complement. Instead a European woman was one “who reproduced race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being homebound in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man” (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). This dichotomous model established the ideal(ized) national body based on the European bourgeois woman's characteristics, having a great impact on the treatment of the Indigenous female body. Race differentiated one group from the other, positioning them as opposites.

Puerto Rican historian Jalil Sued Badillo (2002) describes the violent ramifications that colonial processes—such as forced labor in mines and *haciendas* and rapes—had on Indigenous

women.

Las últimas noticias que se registraron sobre la suerte de las mujeres que quedaron en [la Isla] nos hablan de enfermedades, suicidios colectivos, fugas, prostitución, abortos e infanticidios. Las mujeres ahogaban su cría, como el último gesto suyo de resistencia contra el invasor bárbaro. The latest news that was registered about the fate of Indigenous women who were in the Island tells of diseases, collective suicides, escapes, prostitution, abortions, and infanticide. Women drowned their babies as their last act of resistance against the barbarian invader. (p. 55)

This statement gives an idea of Indigenous women's forms of resistance against slavery. These forms of resistance reveal the pressure Indigenous women were under, but also how some of these resistances were used as a last form of self-agency with regard to their own bodies (escapes) and their community (collective suicides). However, the massive loss of Indigenous community continued to increase, provoking the onset of the African slave trade.

African female slaves experienced a similar fate to the one of Indigenous women. In this case, oppression of African female bodies focused on sexual abuses and reproductive control. Sociologist Rhoda E. Reddock (1995) provides insights about these forms of oppression. Although focused on the British and French colonies of the Caribbean, Reddock's work is important in order to understand how African women's bodies were targeted by the slave system from a Caribbean perspective.²¹ She highlights African women's free labor as slaves and the reproductive control that was imposed by the masters. Masters utilized their bodies as assets, and this included deciding when it was convenient to have more children.

As in the case of Indigenous women, African women's capacity to have children meant they experienced violence in different ways than enslaved men (Reddock, 1995). There were

periods when pregnancy benefitted the owner as an increase in human capital. In these cases, pregnancy was encouraged (Reddock, 1995). Puerto Rican literature scholar Zaira O. Rivera Casellas (2005) cites Cayetano Coll y Toste (1850–1930), a member of the elite who described the practice of placing the belly of a pregnant female slave in a hole during whipping in order to protect the material value of the fetus that, once born, would serve both foremen and *hacendados* or landowners (p. 123). However, the economic value of enslaved women’s offspring did not save these children from the brutalities of slavery.

According to Reddock (1995), “slave women disliked having children” due to the living conditions within these processes of violence (p. 130). As practiced by Indigenous women, slave women terminated their pregnancies through abortions and infanticide as a form of resistance. Additionally, the lack of healthcare exposed them to diseases and dietary deficiencies, resulting in low fertility rates, gynecological disorders, and high infant mortality (Reddock, 1995). As Reddock argues, these realities have had a continuous effect and led to present-day gender-based oppressions: “Caribbean slavery will throw light on the mechanisms of control and oppression used on women internationally today” (p. 138). Despite taking on different forms, these patriarchal and colonial legacies prevail today in the perpetual targeting of women’s sexuality and reproductive abilities.

Section Two: The Post-emancipation Era and the Surveillance of Libertas’ Bodies

During the post-emancipation period in 1873, former slave women, or *libertas*,²² continued to be under surveillance by the authorities. Slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico as a result of a combination of political events, including anti-Spanish revolts in Cuba and Puerto Rico; political processes in Spain, including the liberal revolution that began in 1868; and

pressures from abolitionists in the Island (Matos Rodríguez, 2004; Rivera Casellas, 2005; Rodríguez Silva, 2012). The emancipation of slaves did not stop dominant institutions of power from exercising authority and control over freedwomen's bodies. Spanish colonizers and the Catholic Church continued promoting stereotypes that marginalized this particular group of women as an attempt to confine black women to poverty and limit their access to property, among other social resources. Historian Ileana Rodríguez Silva (2012) identifies this as an ideological transitional period in which gender paradigms of former slaves were redefined by the dominant culture, mostly composed of a national-elitist-liberal discourse:

For liberals, former slaves were to become not only free workers but a particular kind of man and woman: the sort that not only would reproduce the economic and social hierarchies that secured local elites' power in the colony but would also lead to the social regeneration required for the island's industrial development and progress. (p. 29)

This liberal discourse would intertwine with gendered ideals to produce an expectation of the kind of people former slaves should become. This system specifically differentiated former female slaves from elite women, because at the time, "liberal ideals of womanhood rendered female labor as supplementary and subordinate to the needs of the family" (p. 29). I identify these gendered and racialized differentiations as a way to legitimize elite women and keep former female slaves lower in rank and social status.

Rodríguez Silva (2012) identifies this period as one where former slaves began to use a "language of labor" that allowed them "to address issues of inequalities despite their race" (p. 29). While colonial officials focused their efforts on transforming former slaves into masculine/feminine consumers and keeping them impoverished, former slaves negotiated their status as laborers in need of more benefits and political rights in order to improve their labor

skills (p. 14). However, *libertas* kept facing a gender paradigm that portrayed them as illegitimate workers, which was profitable for the elite class (Rodríguez Silva, 2012). The profile of the ideal(ized) national body solidified around European standards; therefore, *libertas* could imitate but could never be the “real” ideal. *Libertas* constituted the most marginalized sector of the 19th century, as Rodríguez Silva (2012) argues.

In order to create and enforce the ideal(ized) national body, the colonial powers used the constructions of gender and race to position black and other women of color as inconvenient presences in the nation. The stereotypes that surrounded their gender and race categorized them as subhuman, dangerous, and immoral beings. The culture that normalized these beliefs formally justified them through laws such as the anti-concubinage campaign. Historian Félix V. Matos Rodríguez (2004) reports the emergence of this campaign during the mid-19th century, established by “Spanish colonial officials and members of San Juan’s elite” (Matos Rodríguez, 2004, p. 214). This campaign was manifested through the surveillance of *libertas*—in particular, unmarried mothers—because “the existence of such women who were not under the clear control of a male head of household provided a destabilizing model in a society deeply rooted in patriarchy, authority and colonialism” (Matos Rodríguez, 2004, p. 213). This form of institutionalized racism and sexism, based on sexual stereotypes and moral codes, associated *libertas* with sexual promiscuity, a stereotype that has been carried by women of color since the early years of colonization (Matos Rodríguez, 2004). In theory and practice, surveillance proved to be a form of control that allowed authorities to regulate the urban mobility and socialization of female bodies of color.

Libertas worked mostly in what were seen as female-oriented jobs and were excluded from “traditionally defined artisanship” labor (Rodríguez Silva, 2012, p. 50). Domestic labor was

one of the main professions for *libertas* that had a twofold purpose for the elite: to profit from their work and teach them “acceptable female behavior” (p. 50). Indeed, Rodríguez Silva (2012) highlights the fact that post-emancipation liberal reformists equated “reliable labor with morality” (p. 36). This statement reflects the dominant ideology that *libertas* did not fit colonial gendered expectations of womanhood. It also reveals how the post-emancipation civilizing mission changed slightly to a freedom-like process, yet continued Eurocentric notions of inferiority and difference.

Matos Rodríguez (2004) states that colonial rule continued having great power over *libertas*’ bodies. For example, he mentions that police reports demonstrate the efforts by authorities to monitor *libertas* as “suspicious women” (Matos Rodríguez, 2004, p. 210). This surveillance project included segregation and key urban localization in places where they could be observed by the authorities. *Libertas*’ gatherings, whether social or work-related, caused suspicion and intolerance from the authorities. Others were banned from their towns for being the concubines of men with “respectful” status, as was the case with Balbina Alonso, “who lived in San Juan, Puerto Rico, [and] was accused of having an illicit love affair with Don Antonio Cordero” in 1824 by Church authorities (Matos Rodríguez, 2004, p. 202). *Libertas* like Alonso “carried a price in the relentless supervision and control imposed on them” (Matos Rodríguez, 2004, p. 214). The suspicion and physical expulsion of these female bodies from urban locations is evidence of the limitations and systemic inequalities of the emancipation of slaves. Although they were freed, colonial and Christian authorities felt entitled to control the sexuality and enforce traditional and conservative ideas of gender on these female bodies.

However, *libertas* found creative ways to resist violence and oppression that allowed them to navigate systems of power. Matos Rodríguez (2004) states, “colonial officials were

forced to tolerate some of [the] urban mobility and freedoms” of *libertas* (p. 214). Rodríguez Silva (2012) agrees with Matos Rodríguez, claiming that through “the language of labor and contracts, authorities responded positively to some of the women’s claims” (p. 29). Specifically, *libertas* were able to mobilize and even negotiate with their employers for “benefits and labor arrangements and obtain more autonomy” (Rodríguez Silva, 2012, p. 50). According to Rodríguez Silva, women revoked contracts and moved individually from one job to another in search of better labor agreements (p. 52). Other examples show how *libertas* improved their “wages, access to resources, and the reconstitution of sexual partnerships, families, and communities” (p. 55). These benefits permitted *libertas* to exercise self-agency in the contract negotiations and mobility from one job to another.

This history of authoritarian and systematic policing of female bodies during and after slavery reveals how colonial officials constructed gender in Puerto Rico. The ideal(ized) national body emerged during this time period through the promotion of a womanhood that could not be fulfilled by everyone. This form of ideal womanhood was exclusive to white European bourgeois women, and promoted racist stereotypes that categorized women of color’s bodies as promiscuous and inappropriate to the nation. This gendered phenomenon maintained a colonial discriminatory imbalance between Europeans and non-Europeans based on class and race, which in turn ensured supremacy to the bourgeois. The following section presents other iterations of these unequal practices, which continually targeted the Puerto Rican female body.

Section Three: Discourses of Ideal(ized) Womanhood and Reproductive Control Under U.S.

Domain

In this section, I analyze two main themes: (1) what is being said about ideal womanhood

or the narrative of an ideal womanhood, and (2) analysis of reproductive control campaigns from late 19th to early 20th centuries in the Island. The transition from Spanish to U.S. colonial rule in 1898 was a significant period of change in all aspects of Puerto Rico's society, and for Puerto Rican subjectivities. It was during those years that a Puerto Rican identity began to emerge through national discourses and the literature of the intellectuals of the time (Cortés Zavala, 1997). Prior to the U.S. invasion, a Creole population existed within middle, upper and popular classes who advocated for political reforms and the autonomy of the Island (Rodríguez Silva, 2012). There were three dominant political divisions: conservatives, liberals, and separatists. Conservatives were mostly Spanish government officials, merchants, and planters (*hacendados*), followers of the Incondicional Español party, which worked to maintain the domain of the Spanish monarchy in Puerto Rico (Rodríguez Silva, 2012). Creoles were mostly liberal-thinking, and many of them belonged to the Autonomista party, which advocated for Puerto Rico's autonomy and suffrage (Rodríguez Silva, 2012). On the other hand, separatists, who were mainly Creole *hacienda* owners and professionals, were a clandestine group that wanted the Island's independence. A separatist revolt called *Grito de Lares* was organized on September 23, 1868, but Spanish military officials detained the rebels the day after the revolution began (Picó, 2006). Although Spain granted autonomy to Puerto Rico in early 1898, the arrival of U.S. forces on July 25 disrupted this process.

Discourses of the Ideal Womanhood

Many liberal thinkers advocating for the autonomy of the Island adopted a pro-colonial discourse once the United States had power over the Island (Rodríguez Silva, 2012). Examples of this can be found in the writings of intellectuals like Salvador Brau (1842–1912), who urged citizens to greet the new empire with an attitude of adaptation and enjoyment so that Puerto Rico

could evolve into a modern society (Cortés Zavala, 1997). Others, however, questioned the benefits this new empire would bring to the Island because the United States was in the middle of the Jim Crow era. Liberal autonomist Mariano Abril (1861–1935) was one of those politicians who, referring to Puerto Rico’s history and the presence of races other than white European, argued that “the United States believed progress was conditioned by the ethnic and sociological history of a nation’s people, and therefore Puerto Rico and Cuba would never achieve success” (Rodríguez Silva, 2012, p. 144). In the midst of these colonial and racial identity discussions, national discourse about women and the nation surfaced and continued into the 20th century.

Regardless of political points of view, patriarchy was at the core of these national discourses about Puerto Rico and the United States, which served to continue promoting male privilege. During this time period, citizens seemed to split into two factions: those who wanted to preserve the traditional image of the Puerto Rican woman who venerates her European roots but also works toward the construction of a Puerto Rican identity, and those who wanted the “freedoms” of the new U.S. colonial power, such as education for women (Cortés Zavala, 1997). The first group supported the maintenance of patriarchal power over women’s bodies and identities. The second focused on campaigns and laws to give the nation a sophisticated image upholding governmental and colonial interests.

Certainly, in the discussion of ideal womanhood both sides had conflicting political ideologies, yet they also worked together to protect patriarchal supremacy and traditional women’s gender roles as “natural” characteristics of the female body. Those gender roles limited the female body to its performance only as mothers, wives, and daughters (Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). Women’s dedication to fulfilling these gender roles determined their loyalty to the nation. This dedication seemed to be associated with female bodies’ ability to give

birth and secure the stability of the nuclear family. The nation was strengthening as an extension of women's commitment to their families. In the words of Alcaide Ramirez (2011):

La mujer quedó admitida dentro [de la sociedad] como madre de la familia nacional, sin refutar las jerarquías patriarcales establecidas. La nación quedaba, así, construida como familia jerarquizada bajo el mando del patriarca, que además era blanco [y heterosexual]. A woman was [socially] admitted only as the mother of the national family, without refuting the established patriarchal hierarchies. The nation was built as a hierarchical family under the command of the patriarch, who was also white [and heterosexual]. (p. 4)

The role of “mother” of the national family, as Alcaide Ramirez acknowledges, is exclusive to certain women of a specific race and sexual orientation. Without these characteristics, women lacked virtue, and as a consequence, had less value.

It is important to note how this notion of ideal womanhood is consistent with the gender ideologies of colonial Europeans and mid-19th century liberals mentioned in the previous two sections. Likewise, U.S. cultural notions of gender were also based on a bourgeois, white, and Christian model (Alexander, 2005; Findlay Suarez, 1999). The following examples show both modes of discourse about womanhood, sometimes presenting women as victims, traitors, or saviors of the nation. What these examples have in common is the patriarchal perspective of the female body and its relationship to the nation.

In *Documentos del Feminismo en Puerto Rico: Facsímiles de la Historia*, Rivera Lassén and Crespo Kebler (2001) give examples of the first mode of discourse about ideal womanhood through the work of feminist scholars criticizing the patriarchal implications of the literature of the time. These examples make reference to the image of the colonizer stealing everything in his

path, including Puerto Rican women. One of the scholars mentioned in *Documentos del Feminismo en Puerto Rico* is feminist lawyer María D. Fernós, who makes an analysis of the women as portrayed in the stories of Puerto Rican writer José Luis González (1926–1997). According to Fernós, these stories present women’s liberation as an ideology the United States introduced in the Island that had negative impacts, such as depriving men from their manhood, or “la desintegración de los valores familiares,” the disintegration of family values (Crespo Kebler, 2001, p. 69). In this sense, women sometimes are presented as innocent victims, raped by the colonizer that, at the same time, rapes the Motherland with those feminist ideologies. In other cases, women are to blame for those social changes, because they are responsible for precipitating “*la tragedia inevitable*,” the inevitable tragedy of women’s liberation (Crespo Kebler, 2001, p. 69). This example serves as evidence of the ideologies around anti-colonialism linked to anti-feminism. Women are presented as individuals “seducing” the invader, and ultimately, the ones responsible for the sufferings of the nation, suggesting that women and the nation are one. Women’s attempts at changing patriarchal norms are perceived as causing harm to men, the nuclear family, and the nation.

Another scholar whose work also appears in *Documentos del Feminismo en Puerto Rico* is feminist Latin American and Caribbean studies scholar Edna Acosta Belén. One of Acosta Belén’s contributions is based on her observations of the work of Puerto Rican authors in the 1950s.²³ She identifies abundant images of U.S. colonizers as thieves, stealing everything, including Puerto Rican women. Other images portrayed Puerto Rican women as gold diggers demanding more from men (Crespo Kebler, 2001). The analyses provided by Fernós and Acosta Belén show how mainstream representations of womanhood were limited to good/bad dichotomies. The “good” woman is described as powerless, naïve, and sacrificed, while the

“bad” woman is the opposite.

One last example I want to discuss is the Puerto Rican tale *Guanina*. This tale personifies the good/bad dichotomy through one female character. Supposedly, this story dates back to the 16th century and was written by Puerto Rican historian and writer Cayetano Coll y Toste in his book *Leyendas Puertorriqueñas* (1926). It is a tragic love story about an Indigenous woman, Guanina, and a Spanish colonizer, Cristóbal de Sotomayor. Guanina tells Sotomayor that the Indians are creating a plot to assassinate him. At the end of the story, Guanina reveals her love for the Spanish soldier and intercedes in an effort to save his life. After killing Sotomayor, the Indians decide Guanina must be sacrificed at Sotomayor’s funeral so that she may accompany him to the next life. The story highlights the traitorous Indigenous woman and presents the Indigenous community as savages, and as a consequence, Guanina is sentenced to death for treason. Within the same discourse, Coll y Toste’s (1926) imaginary of Guanina is described as follows:

Una hermosa india, de tez bronceada, ojos expresivos, levantado pecho, suaves contornos y cabellos abundosos, medio recogidos en trenzas, a estilo antiguo castellano. A beautiful Indian, bronzed skin, expressive eyes, chest lifted, smooth contours and abundant hair that was slightly braided, like Castilian old style. (p. 1)

The hypersexual language that describes Guanina’s physical and feminine attributes portrays her as an irresistible woman. This language not only justifies the love story of a Spanish man who will risk his life for an Indian but also suggests that Guanina is already assimilating herself by doing her hair in a “Castilian” style. However, because of her indigeneity, Guanina is not the ideal(ized) national body. She cannot have the capacity to be a “good” woman, and is therefore the “whore” who seduces powerful men and destroys the peace of her people.

Interestingly, a similar analogy can be found in México's history in which the virgin (e.g., la Virgen de Guadalupe) and the whore (e.g., la Malinche) dichotomy has been exploited in various ways—literature especially—in order to regulate women's bodies and sexuality (Pérez, 1999). Historian Emma Pérez explores this dichotomy and its relationship to Mexican nationalism. She declares, “nationalism becomes a return to the mother—Aztlán—where woman can be only metaphor and object” (Pérez, 1999, p. 122). Thus, the efforts to maintain male privileges within the systems of power of nations are characteristically patriarchal but also have racialized and classist manifestations (Alcaide Ramirez, 2011). The essence of those efforts is based on the good/bad dichotomy that defines women's human value. According to Rodríguez Silva (2012), fictional stories of the time focused on sexual behavior—of lower-class women of color in particular—as a trait that “marks gender, class, and racial differences” (p. 68). Intellectuals and politicians used the ideal(ized) national body paradigm to fulfill their moral and political agendas. These privileged people used their position of power to normalize an image of the nation suitable to their particular ideologies and interests.

The second mode of discourses about ideal womanhood can be found in early Puerto Rican feminist discourses of the 20th century. One of these discourses is also revealed in *Documentos del Feminismo en Puerto Rico*, which mentions the work of political scientist Isabel Picó. According to Picó, a machista nationalist ideology emerged in the Island as part of the anti-colonial struggle after the U.S. invasion. She points out how elite women living in the Island during those years of colonial transition saw more educative and professional possibilities in the U.S. empire. At the same time, elite men from anti-colonial ideologies viewed these possibilities that women envisioned as a process that Americanized them (Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). In other words, to advocate for the “progress” that the United States symbolized to

women was perceived as assimilating to the new colonial rule. Equally important, women's access to education represented a threat to intellectuals who enjoyed male privilege. For this reason, they continued excluding women and other non-elite sectors from these national conversations (Alcaide Ramirez, 2011; Findlay, 1999; Rodríguez Silva, 2012).

Alcaide Ramirez (2011) mentions that the rhetoric of intellectuals struggling for the decolonization of Puerto Rico made women—specifically mothers—appear as a symbol of the nation, but reduced to silence. She claims that women were included in the national discourse only as a symbolic form of the nation (Alcaide Ramirez, 2011). As a consequence “ideal” women were required to be agents in the private sphere of the home, but not in political spaces. Alcaide Ramirez (2011) quotes Puerto Rican Hispanic scholar Melanie A. Pérez Ortiz, who states, “woman, it is assumed, can be the nation, and consequently the object for which men will perform their nation-saving deed or actions: men will be the only agents, and the only citizens” (p. 162). Thus, during this Spanish to U.S. colonial transition, the culture of domesticity was strictly attached to the nation in the service of the preservation of traditional and colonial gender roles.

Intellectuals of the time began advocating for women's education without separating them from moral and national discourses. Brau, for example, wrote in “La Campesina” that the education of women would restore society in a moral capacity:

Dignifiquemos a la madre por medio de la enseñanza, y entonces, se regenerará nuestra sociedad desde sus más profundos cimientos, veremos transfigurarse la silueta indecisa de la melancolía. Let's dignify the mother through teaching, and then our society will regenerate from its deepest foundations, we will transfigure the indecisive silhouette of melancholy. (Cortés Zavala, 1997, p. 774)

The mother was once again the protagonist of the nation. The moral projections fell on the mother because the upbringing of children rested on her. Even when women began to have more visibility in public and professional spaces, the symbolic image of the nation continually focused on their patriarchal and moral duties.

This national discourse about women was consistent across political and public spaces, and their womanhood was the defining element. For example, in 1954 revolutionary leader Pedro Albizu Campos gave a speech after members of the nationalist party attacked the House of Representatives in Washington D.C.. Here, he praises his revolutionary colleague Lolita Lebrón, who, along with three other male members, participated in these attacks:

Una heroína puertorriqueña, de sublime belleza, ha vuelto a señalar, para la historia de las naciones, que la mujer es la Patria y que no se puede concebir a la madre esclava. Tampoco es posible albergar la idea de que la Patria sea esclava. Lolita Lebrón y los caballeros de la raza, que la acompañaron en esta jornada de sublime heroísmo, han avisado a los Estados Unidos, envalentonados con sus bombas atómicas, que el deber los obliga a respetar la independencia de todas las naciones; a respetar la independencia de Puerto Rico. Y que los puertorriqueños harán respetar ese derecho sagrado de la Patria.

A Puerto Rican heroine, of sublime beauty, has again pointed out, for the history of nations, that a woman is the Motherland and you cannot conceive a mother as a slave.

Nor can one entertain the idea that the Motherland is a slave. Lolita Lebrón and the knights of the race, who accompanied her on this journey of sublime heroism, have warned the United States, emboldened by their atomic bombs, that duty requires them to respect the independence of all nations; to respect the independence of Puerto Rico. And that Puerto Ricans will respect this sacred right of the Motherland. (Matos Paoli & Freire

de Matos, 2001, pp. XIII–XIV)

Apart from showing admiration for the patriotic feat that Lebrón carried out, Albizu Campos's words reflect the value and link between women and nationhood. The linguistic gender of *Patria*, the Motherland, is feminine, and he makes a clear statement categorizing *Patria*, women, and mother as one. To put it differently, the colonial status of the nation automatically makes the women of the nation slaves of the colonial system. Moreover, the description of Lebrón's femaleness includes being praised as beautiful, unlike the description of her male counterparts, who are called knights of the race.

From the point of view of these discourses the mother of the nuclear family and the mother of the nation are inseparable concepts. This relationship placed a heavy burden on the female body, whose primary function was the female-nation. Moreover, to be mother of the nation is a category linked to racist and classist expectations, subjecting the female body of color to a subordinate social status.

Reproductive Control

The second topic covered in this section is how U.S. colonialism has enforced the ideal(ized) national body in Puerto Rico through the language of health. Research shows that the U.S. military designed programs, such as hygienist campaigns, to be tried out in Puerto Rico and then implemented in the mainland as a way of experimenting and also to start building what they thought the Puerto Rican nation should be. Historian Eileen J. Suárez Findlay (1999) points out the intersection of women and colonial regulations on their bodies. Her research reveals that colonial transitions with both Spain and the United States have shaped Puerto Rican history and its people's national identity. As elite women from the Island were anticipating, the U.S. government created social reforms in family law, marriage, and education. However, Findlay

recognizes that those “Progressive Era reforms” implemented by colonial officials were experiments by the United States in the Island (p. 117). Discourses of morality, for example, were significant in regulating women’s sexuality and sexual reproduction both in the United States and Puerto Rico. Women’s social reputations depended on their ability to follow sexual norms meticulously because this demarcated “the ‘worthy’ from the ‘disreputable’” (Findlay, 1999, p. 2). Namely, there were sociopolitical changes introduced by the United States that seemed to be more progressive than those under Spanish rule; yet, those changes continued molding the ideal(ized) national body through colonial patriarchal norms at the expense of women’s bodies.

An overview of Puerto Rican anti-prostitution campaigns implemented by the U.S. government exposes the imagined characteristics of the ideal(ized) national body in the Island. Both Findlay and historian Ileana Rodríguez Silva mention those campaigns in their research. Findlay (1999) points out that the “anti-venereal campaign” was introduced in the 1890s under Spanish domain to “exterminate prostitution in order to protect the health of the soldiers” (p. 176). However, this campaign was more pronounced under U.S. domain in 1918, making it legal for “suspect women” to “be arrested without cause and submitted to involuntary vaginal exams by the police,” and she adds, “infection with a venereal disease was de facto proof of prostitution” (Findlay, 1999, p. 176). Rodríguez Silva (2012) expands on this campaign’s application against sex workers—specifically targeting poor black women—that held hundreds of women in jails. Those jails were converted into “hospitals and asylums” to “sanitize” them (p. 214). Those campaigns implied the need of a national moral rehabilitation of women who did not conform to the ideal(ized) national body. Gender is significant in the creation of related laws, because “promiscuous” women are the ones typically blamed and punished for “immoral” acts.

Rodríguez Silva states, “instead of targeting soldiers' sexual behavior, the colonial state cracked down on Puerto Rican [sex workers]” (p. 214). She adds, “by confining poor women, colonial authorities and sectors of the Creole elite broke the unspoken pact with labor over morality and health—a pact that was supposed to lead Puerto Rican people to exercise their rights of political participation, not to serve as an excuse to violate their civil liberties” (p. 214). The ideal(ized) national body suggested by the language and laws of morality employed by U.S. authorities was equivalent to subservience and respect within systems of power.

One of the first, if not the first, trials of *maquiladoras* job exports was in Puerto Rico with the textile industry, where women made up the majority of the workforce. This was the Operation Bootstrap era, a series of industrial projects that began in 1948 and marked the transition from agriculture to the industrialization of Puerto Rico. Female labor was the cheapest and this made industries—the textile industry mostly—highly interested in this particular group years before industrialization (Baerga, 1993). These industrial projects introduced women to a variety of workplaces where they could earn a salary and support their families.

In collaboration with the Puerto Rican government, the U.S. pharmaceutical and health industries established centers that offered birth control from the 1930s until the 1960s (Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). Postpartum sterilizations were tested on Puerto Rican women beginning in 1930 (Colón Warren, 2003; Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). Colón Warren (2003) reports that by the 1960s “about a third of women in reproductive age groups” had been sterilized, and by 1995 the level of sterilization increased to “45 percent of those of reproductive age” (pp. 667–668). These statistics make visible a racialized message of control of Puerto Rican’s women’s bodies, which can also be linked to the power relations resulting from the Island’s political status. The feminist movements of Puerto Rico later denounced this act as

abusive because it had an experimental objective behind its supposed benefits for women's quality of life. Lawyer Ana Irma Rivera Lassén and sociologist Elizabeth Crespo Kebler (2001) claim that birth control pills and sterilizations were not only experimentations but also forms of mass population control. However, many women did not reject the use of the birth control pill or sterilizations since it offered a way to limit the number of children, and to resist gender oppression (Colón Warren, 2003; Rivera Lassén, 2007). There were "feminists and women reformers who defended birth control against the more conservative interests on the Island as a means of dealing with illegitimacy, child abandonment, and maternal and child health by opening reproductive options for poor women" (Colón Warren, 2003, p. 681). Therefore, poverty and lack of resources seem to be key in the levels of approval of these campaigns among Puerto Rican women. This fact shows a significant connection between colonial practices and poverty.

The colonial economic obstacles faced by women living under impoverished conditions made access to better resources challenging, thereby limiting their advancement in other sociopolitical spheres. Consequently, solutions to improve their lives were limited. This is evident in the sterilization numbers, which reflect the feminization of poverty and more exposure to violence, among other forms of oppression. Thus, the lack of access to resources affected physical health and security. Feminist historians Marysa Navarro and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (1999) support this claim: "In several places colonialism and neocolonialism marginalized women in the economy, displaced them politically, cooperated with Indigenous males to keep women socially subordinated, or increased the social subordination of women themselves" (p. xxxix). Although the authors refer to the past in this statement, many effects of colonialism and neocolonialism are still a reality for Puerto Rican women.

According to journalist and civil rights activist Frances Beale (1995), Puerto Rico

became “a huge experimental laboratory for medical research before allowing certain practices to be imported and used [in the United States]” (p. 151). Among those practices, the birth control pill was utilized “to evaluate its effect and its efficiency” on Puerto Rican women (Beale, 1995, p. 151). Beale (1995) defines these practices as “bedroom politics:” the appropriation of women’s reproductive rights used for political and economic purposes and not for their own health (p. 150). Racial and gender factors were among the main reasons to “*controlar la población y garantizar a la vez la mano de obra barata que las industrias necesitaban* (control the population and ensure the cheap labor that the industry needed)” (Rivera Lassén, 2001, p. 101). These facts uncover the constant racial and gender vilification Puerto Rican women suffered for decades.

This discourse was present even in the 1970s civil rights movement, when various feminist-identified organizations emerged in Puerto Rico and the Americas. Rivera Lassén recounts how nationalists viewed feminism as a U.S. assimilation ideology (p. 109). When she co-founded the organization Mujer Intégrate Ahora (MIA), groups that wanted independence for Puerto Rico regarded MIA as a U.S. assimilationist organization. She recounts, “*para esas personas la liberación femenina era asunto de los asimilistas y la verdadera liberación vendría junto a la liberación nacional y socialista,*” for such people women’s liberation was a matter of assimilation and true deliverance would come alongside the national and socialist liberation (p. 109). More importantly, Rivera Lassén claims that feminist organizations struggled with both the obstacles from external oppressive systems and the ones created by Puerto Ricans attached to the national liberation values disguised in sexist traditions that placed feminist agendas as secondary issues (p. 110). This claim demonstrates one more time how partisan ideologies based on heteropatriarchal hierarchies narrowed the association between woman and nation, linking the

national liberation of the Island as a “good” woman’s task, and blaming “bad” women for not prioritizing the feminist agenda. Family responsibilities and cultural patterns continued valuing women within a limited patriarchal framework. This nationalist discourse promulgated a patriarchal framework as the natural and patriotic behavior to follow as a legitimate woman-citizen.

Conclusion

Historically, colonial and state authorities have put great effort into regulating women through processes of violence, specifically through sexual and reproductive control. These discourses and practices reveal how the ideal(ized) national body was constructed and reinforced. The examples included in this chapter (1) indicate that those processes are detrimental to female bodies—in particular those with unprivileged status—which is evident in the limited, gendered categorizations that reduced female bodies to good/bad and innocent/guilty dichotomies; and (2) uncover how, for over two centuries, the female body was the locus of conflicting political interests that sought to create a monolithic national identity. There is a pattern of abuses that began with the control of Indigenous women during colonial rule, and continued evolving as surveillance of and experimentations on female bodies in the 20th century. The following chapter explores how the ideal(ized) national body operates in the neocolonial moment through the state and its institutions, replicating the same forms of abuses once employed by colonial authorities.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Ideal(ized) National Body Under Neocolonial Violence

The *Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres (OPM)*, or Women's Advocacy Office, emerged in Puerto Rico during the first years of the 21st century as part of a series of events that were occurring globally and locally with respect to women's rights. Some of these historical events were taking place in the United States and Latin America during the 1960s and 70s. In the United States, for example, feminist movements achieved significant legal victories, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Title X Family Planning Program of 1970. As part of this historical period, women in Puerto Rico pushed for the creation of the *Comisión de Asuntos de la Mujer*, or Women's Issues Commission, in 1973 (Fernós, 2007). This commission began to work mostly on the improvement of laws that perpetuated women's subordination in marriage and the workplace, as well as the creation of new laws that protected women's rights.

In 1975, after announcing a new initiative called the UN Decade for Women, the United Nations (UN) organized the First International Women's Conference in México, which gave women's rights a global presence. The countries that participated in this conference—133 member state delegates—signed an international agreement to report periodically to the UN the initiatives and mechanisms established to promote women's rights, including the revision of the legal structures, policies, and programs that could restrict their civil and political rights (Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres, 2014). The OPM arose as one of those mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights. In the early 1990s, feminists identified the need to transform the *Comisión de Asuntos de la Mujer* into an entity with more political power (Alonso Calderón & Zayas, 2008; Fernós, 2007). In 1996 a group of mostly feminist professionals began

structuring what eventually became the *Ley Número 20 del 11 de abril de 2001*, also known as the Law of the OPM.

That same year feminists in Puerto Rico began urging political parties to include the creation of the OPM in their electoral platforms. All the candidates running for governor in the 2000 elections agreed to create such an office. The elected governor was Sila María Calderón, the first female governor of Puerto Rico, who represented the pro-commonwealth political party.

Calderón's administration was committed to pushing forward the OPM, and on April 11, 2001, *Ley 20*—also known as the *Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres*, or Law of the Women's Advocacy Office—was approved (Alonso Calderón & Zayas, 2008; Fernós, 2007). This law required the establishment of the OPM to strengthen and enforce public policies that guarantee the human rights of women and promote concrete actions to eliminate discrimination against them (*Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres*, 2014). In 2002 the OPM opened its doors. Since then, the OPM has survived multiple attacks by political officials

This chapter focuses on two specific attacks enacted by governmental officials against the OPM: the forced entrance of Carlos Pesquera into this office in order to hoist the flag of the United States in 2002, and former governor Luis Fortuño's establishment of two "anti-violence" campaigns that advanced traditional gender and family roles from 2009 to 2013. These attacks illuminate normative neoliberal²⁴ discourses of the ideal(ized) national body in the contemporary neocolonial moment. First, I analyze Pesquera's attack on the OPM as a symbolic performance of patriarchal dominance with political ends. Second, Fortuño's campaigns are examined as policy-level attacks.

It is important to emphasize that the two politicians leading the attacks against the OPM identify with the pro-statehood political party (PNP). This fact does not mean that political

leaders from other parties have not contributed to attacking the OPM or targeted other spaces that work for women's rights. Thus, the intention of this chapter is not to generate opposition to the PNP's ideologies. Rather, I want to make a point about how contemporary practices align with colonial ideals of the female body—explored in the previous chapter—and have neoliberal outcomes that place women's safety as a secondary issue. I characterize these incidents as neocolonial because they are contemporary manifestations invested in the defense of and preference for the U.S. nation and its practices. Similarly, they are neoliberal actions used by political parties to reduce public expenditure or social services, thus prioritizing political agendas over people's safety and welfare. Neoliberal regimes construct gender violence as isolated incidents rather than as produced and regulated by the state. The outcome of this neoliberal dynamic is to minimize the impact of gender violence by blaming individuals and not acting to prevent it.

By looking at these attacks, I argue that while feminist movements view the establishment of the OPM as an unprecedented achievement in the fight to enhance women's rights, this office also represented a threat to politicians seeking to perpetuate a national identity that they considered appropriate to fit into the United States. I address this argument in three sections. *Section One: Functions and Significance of La Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres* describes the OPM's initial efforts to eradicate gender violence and the changes it has undergone since its establishment. In the context of this study I frame the OPM as a feminist vision of work within the government of Puerto Rico. *Section Two: The Abrupt Entrance of Pesquera to Hoist the United States Flag* and *Section Three: The Promesa de Hombre and Tus Valores Cuentan Initiatives* present a description of the two attacks on the OPM mostly based on accounts from newspapers and other public media. I end this chapter with a conclusion that leads

us to Chapter Four, which includes the descriptions of the feminist street performances.

Section One: Functions and Significance of La Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres

Before the Women's Advocacy Office (OPM) opened its doors in 2002, other government-based commissions on women's issues already existed. One example is the 1968 *Comisión del Gobernador sobre el Status de la Mujer*, which had a limited impact at the legislative and governmental levels. There was also the *Comisión Especial de legisladores*, established in 1969, which recommended the creation of the 1971 *Comisión de Derechos Civiles* in order to do an in-depth study on the discrimination of women in Puerto Rico (Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). The *Comisión de Asuntos de la Mujer*—first called the *Comisión para el Mejoramiento de los Derechos de la Mujer*—emerged in 1974 as part of these initiatives in combination with the support of *Mujer Intégrate Ahora* (MIA), the first feminist-identified organization, established in 1972.

The changes that the *Comisión de Asuntos de la Mujer* achieved were significant and opened political possibilities that eventually led to the creation of the OPM. Among those changes were the creation of new laws giving more economic rights to married women (*Reforma de la Familia* of 1976) and the 1977 opening of the *Centro de Ayuda a Víctimas de Violación*, a center to help sexual assault victims (Rivera Lassén & Crespo Kebler, 2001). However, the *Comisión* answered to the Governor of Puerto Rico, which limited its direction based on the elected person's partisan affiliation. This could result in the elimination of projects that the previous governor was trying to push forward and the proposal of new projects that aligned with the administration's political agenda.

In comparison, *Ley 20* had several characteristics that differentiated the OPM from other

governmental agencies, as well as other ministries, secretaryships, and divisions related to women's rights in the Americas (Alonso Calderón & Zayas, 2008). The person in charge of the office would hold the position of *Procuradora* or Women's Advocate for a 10-year period (Ley de la Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres, 2014). This allowed the *Procuradora* to maintain the OPM as an independent entity—separate from any other public or legal agency—to prevent the political elections from interrupting its projects every four years (Fernós, 2007). This strategy was an effort to keep the appointment of the *Procuradora* as a non-partisan position in comparison with the always-changing direction of other Island governmental agencies.

As a mechanism for the advancement of women, recommended by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (or CEPAL by its Spanish acronym), the OPM began to function as a governmental office to identify the policies that the government should approve or improve in order to eradicate discrimination against women. Although the OPM did not give direct services to women, it ensured the existence and financial support of those services (Alonso Calderón & Zayas, 2008). The OPM also established communication with feminist groups, community, and civic organizations, and other international and regional organizations (Fernós, 2007). These functions represented a major feminist achievement because they provided more legal power than any other *comisión* or group working on women's issues at the governmental level. Because these functions gave OPM representatives a sense of independence from the governor's office to improve women's rights, this office became a symbolic space of inclusivity and consensus among feminist organizations.

Apart from its mandated duties, the OPM gained public visibility in the Island by marching in the streets of San Juan with flags, an act initiated by the first *Procuradora*, attorney María Dolores Fernós. Seeing that there was little communication between the legislative

process and legal actions to protect victims of violence, beginning in 2005, Procuradora Fernós started walking through the streets of San Juan to protest every gender-based murder of a woman. Fernós and those who accompanied her—including employees and unaffiliated individuals—held purple flags with a Venus symbol in the middle. The total number of flags represented the number of women killed in cases of gender-based violence. On November 17, 2005, for example, the group walked with 18 flags for the 18 victims assassinated so far that year (Álvarez Vázquez, 2005). In this act, the OPM also distributed material with resources for social services and flyers with information about the murdered women to onlookers as a way of raising awareness about the need to eradicate violence. These person-to-person interactions made the OPM visible at the local level, while media coverage of the campaign provided visibility at the national level.

In 2006, feminists from different organizations began another project to prevent violence, this time in the public schools of the Island. Their plan was to develop an educational curriculum that would build tolerance and respect for non-normative and non-dominant identities, based on gender, religion, and sexuality. The overall intention of this project was to prevent all forms of violence through a long-term outlook that began educating individuals from early ages. In 2008 the Department of Education created the circular letter #3-2008-2009, which presented the initial steps to be approved and, eventually, implemented in the curriculum. However, Luis Fortuño's administration refused to implement this campaign, despite the fact that *Ley 108*, approved on May 26, 2006, requires a curriculum aimed at promoting gender equity and the prevention of domestic violence (Rodríguez-Coss, 2010). The gender perspective project was at a standstill for several years until 2011, when Fortuño instituted a counter-campaign called *Promesa de Hombre*, discussed further in *Section Three* of this chapter. It was not until January 2015 that the

Secretary of the Department of Education, Rafael Román, announced he was working to implement a curriculum with a gender perspective in the schools as specified in the circular letter #3-2008-2009 (Quintero, 2015).

The political climate that emerged during the first decade of the 21st century has significantly obstructed the possibilities that the feminist movements originally imagined with the opening of the OPM. Fernós resigned in 2007 after over five years in the position of *Procuradora*. According to her statements to the media, she decided to move on with her career as a law professor and leave the position to a younger person who could bring new strategies to the office.²⁵ Since Fernós's resignation, another five *Procuradoras* have passed through the OPM. In 2007 the position of *Procuradora* began to lose traction due to economic crisis and partisan conflicts within the Capitol of the Island. In 2008, Aníbal Acevedo Vilá (PPD), who was the governor at the time, appointed Fernós's successor Marta Angélica Mercado Sierra, who had worked in the OPM since it opened and was the sub-*Procuradora* under Fernós. However, the new governor Luis G. Fortuño Burset (PNP) replaced Mercado Sierra with a new *Procuradora* in 2009.

It is important to highlight that after the Fernós's resignation, feminists mobilized to create the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* (MAMPR), a movement consisting of a broad coalition of feminists from various organizations in the Island. The MAMPR would recommend to the governor a list of women with experience working on women's issues in order to have a competent *Procuradora* running the OPM. The recommendations were made public in December 2007, but both Fortuño and the Puerto Rican Senate, where the majority represented the PNP party, ignored the MAMPR. Fortuño described his political agenda as pro-statehood, conservative, religious, and republican, and he seemed to require a new *Procuradora* who

represented his political party and views. The 2009 *Procuradora*, lawyer Johanne Vélez García, partially met those requirements, but her appointment ended after a four-month period when she publicly stated that she was pro-choice and in favor of same-sex marriage—a clear indication that her views did not conform to Fortuños’s conservative agenda. Her successor, Ivonne Feliciano, who was appointed during the time that the street performances discussed in this study were carried out, shared Fortuño’s political agenda; however, Feliciano resigned a year later. Ada Elsie Colón stepped in for a few weeks as interim *Procuradora*, and that same year the current *Procuradora*, Wanda Vázquez, took the office.

The OPM began as a desired space where feminists could have more power in the decisions concerning women in the Island. However, that desired/imagined space was ultimately unable to fulfill the initial functions necessary to facilitate these changes. Partisan ideologies have continued to influence the different twists this office has taken throughout the years, as multiple politicians have used the position of *Procuradora* to advance their own political agendas. This transferred decision-making power mostly into the hands of governmental authorities prioritizing their own partisan interests. The following two sections provide accounts of two attacks that are indicative of the extremes of such political climates and the ways in which the formative functions of the OPM changed or diminished because of these attacks.

Section Two: The Abrupt Entrance of Pesquera to Hoist the United States Flag

On June 20, 2002, Carlos Pesquera, former gubernatorial candidate and president of the pro-statehood political party in Puerto Rico (PNP), enacted symbolic and material violence against the OPM. Pesquera and 50 other members of his political party took over the street in front of the OPM with the ostensible goal of hoisting the United States flag side by side with the

flag of Puerto Rico, as is traditionally done in the public offices in the Island. A riot began around noon, when Pesquera and his supporters learned that María D. Fernós had decided to hoist only the Puerto Rican flag in the OPM. Fernós, who identifies with the Independence Party (PIP), explained that she was not required to hoist the U.S. flag by law. A short video published on YouTube shows the crowd blocking the street, huddling outside the door loudly demanding their entrance to the OPM, with some people standing everywhere, even on top of cars while raising American flags in their hands (Ruddy Matta, 2005). Through a megaphone, the voice of Senator Miriam Martínez (PNP) prevailed:

Nosotros no vamos a dejar que nos venza la independencia y el separatismo. Ella no se atreve a dar la cara porque ella lo que no quiere es que la bandera americana entre aquí. We will not let the independence and separatism overcome us. She [Fernós] does not dare to show her face because what she does not want is the American flag to enter here.

Other politicians spoke through the megaphone making similar claims. Employees explained to the crowd that they would be allowed to enter one by one. However, the crowd continued screaming phrases such as “*¡Usted no es la dueña de la democracia!*” You are not the owner of democracy!

In the meantime, Fernós carried out a press conference that revealed the communication she had had with Governor Sila M. Calderón:

El estado de derecho presente mandata la presencia solamente de la bandera de Puerto Rico. La gobernadora me ha dado instrucciones de que en consideración a la tradición que toda agencia tendrá la bandera de los Estados Unidos en el vestíbulo junto a la de Puerto Rico. Así se hará al comienzo del próximo día laborable. The present state of law

mandates the presence of only the Puerto Rican flag. The governor has instructed me that in consideration of tradition every agency will have the flag of the United States in the lobby next to the Puerto Rican flag. It will be done at the beginning of the next business day.

The crowd seemed unsatisfied with this announcement, and in response, Pesquera took the microphone and said, “*Hasta que no la coloque no nos vamos, [Fernós] no nos va a mover de aquí,*” we are not leaving until the flag is hoisted, Fernós is not going to move us from here.

Next, one sees the front glass door of the OPM shattered, and following, images of Pesquera forcibly entering the OPM. The crowd screams his name with euphoria, *¡Pesquera! ¡Pesquera!* Then, Pesquera, carrying a flag of the United States, forcibly pushes himself and the people around him up the stairs to make his way to the second floor, where the office is located. Some people try to stop him and others try to help him; screams are heard as this is happening.

Eventually, Pesquera arrives on the second floor, puts the flag on his right shoulder, looks at the crowd, and with his left hand blows them a kiss. In the background a woman screams an obscene word, suggesting her disapproval. Outside, the chaos is evident. A cameraman tries to push his way out of the mass of people using his camera as a shield, but the crowd pushes him, making him stagger in different directions. At the end, a woman is taken into an ambulance while Pesquera makes his way out of the office with a jaunty face, greeting the crowd and shaking his arms upward in a signal of triumph. Journalist Dennise Y. Pérez (2002) describes this part to the newspaper *El Vocero*:

Luego de un par de minutos, todos se marcharon con actitud triunfante, pero dejando atrás un grupo de empleados que miraban atónitos y con lágrimas en los ojos, además de un agente policiaco y la vicepresidenta del partido, Lucy Arce, de camino al hospital.

After a couple of minutes, everyone left with triumphant attitude, but leaving behind a group of employees who looked astonished and with tears in their eyes, along with a police officer and the vice president of the party, Lucy Arce, on the way to the hospital.

(p. 3)

The same journalist mentioned the fact that Pesquera's son, Carlitos, was beside him the entire time. Most of the Island's newspaper articles describing this incident stressed the violence with which the politicians demonstrated their complaints. Understandably, this incident interrupted the services of the OPM.

One can speculate as to why Pesquera, who lost the elections against Calderón in 2000, wanted the U.S. flag to be hoisted at that moment in particular. In an interview with the Associated Press, Pesquera justified his actions, blaming the government for allowing Fernós to exhibit only the Puerto Rican flag. In fact, he described Fernós's action as provocative and illegal. In addition, he said, "*Ellos [la OPM] violentaron mi derecho civil de entrar a un edificio público, por unas razones políticas.*" The OPM violated my civil right to enter into a public building because of political reasons ("Fichados los líderes," 2002, para.18). Feminist organizations promptly denounced these actions as violent and despicable. Lawyer and spokeswoman for the MAMPR Josefina Pantojas stated:

No es aceptable que se pretenda excusar los actos de agresión y violencia contra la Procuraduría con el pretexto de que fueron provocados. Esta es la misma excusa que usan los agresores para justificar su violencia contra las mujeres . . . [Pero] para la violencia contra las mujeres no hay ninguna excusa. It is unacceptable to justify these acts of aggression and violence against the Women's Advocacy Office with the pretext that they were provoked. This is the same excuse used by aggressors to justify their

violence against women, and there is no justification for such violence. (“Organizaciones pro mujer,” 2002, para. 3)

In 2004 Pesquera and three other politicians accused of inciting a riot at the OPM were found not guilty of all counts during trial.

From the perspective of this study’s analytical critique, Pesquera’s actions were a symbolic performance of patriarchal dominance with political ends. There are three moments from Pesquera’s attack on the OPM that exemplify this: (1) his public expressions blaming the OPM for not hoisting the U.S. flag, (2) the violent entrance into the OPM with the U.S. flag, and (3) the celebration of his “triumph.” First, as he stands in front of the OPM, Pesquera argues that Procuradora Fernós is not the owner of democracy and that the OPM violated his civil right to enter a public building because of the political party that he represents. With these arguments he sets the stage to physically enact the takeover. By blaming the OPM for his actions, Pesquera reproduces a *machista* victim-blaming discourse. Aggressors use this discourse and the tenets of rape culture that blame victims of sexual assault and other forms of violence for “provoking” the aggressor’s actions. Similarly, he uses words like *democracy* and *civil rights* but twists their meanings toward his own political views. From this point of view, Fernós becomes the provocateur, which “justifies” Pesquera’s use of violence.

Ironically, he was found not guilty of these actions, which affirms that acts like this are socially sanctioned and diminish social responsibility in stopping and preventing abuse against women.

Second, Pesquera embodies a role of “protector” of the U.S. nation in Puerto Rico. Through the use of violence, Pesquera feels entitled and supported by the crowd to enter into the OPM, making this violence an expressive behavior of his political identity. The image of

Pesquera invading the office and utilizing violence to hoist and defend the honor of the U.S. flag is a replica of the exploitation carried out by colonizers, forcing entry to the land and to bodies. Indeed, the attack symbolically evokes a rape scene, displaying power and control over others. By prioritizing his U.S. national pride, Pesquera prevented the operation of the OPM while also putting at risk the safety of the people working at the office. In addition, the visible reaction among the people inside the office indicates the fear this attack elicited.

Third, the moment Pesquera departs from the OPM looking triumphant while disengaging from what is happening around him demonstrates a patriarchal entitlement to invade a space and leave without regrets. In this particular moment Pesquera presents himself to the cameras as a “hero” walking around a crowd waving U.S. flags, hugging him, and accompanying him as they abandon the premises and leave chaos behind them. In this sense, a performance of hypermasculinity takes place in this attack, stepping violently on anything that “disrespects” any national representation of the United States, especially when its power is at stake.

Section Three: The Promesa de Hombre and Tus Valores Cuentan Initiatives

Eight years and two governors after the Pesquera incident, the government of Luis Fortuño assigned over a million dollars for the implementation of *Promesa de Hombre*, or Man’s Promise (Departamento de la Familia, 2011; Rivera Vargas, 2011). According to Fortuño, *Promesa de Hombre* was a preventive initiative to be implemented in the public schools of the Island to engage males from childhood into old age to treat women with dignity and respect, and not to use physical or psychological violence under any circumstances (Lenín López, 2011). This campaign emerged after the governor ignored the initiatives promoted by the OPM to prevent violence against women, including a curriculum with a gender perspective in the schools of the

Island to prevent gender violence. Therefore, *Promesa de Hombre* functioned as an alternative campaign that worked in tandem with his conservative ideals.

The campaign targeted men and boys as the group to be impacted. According to a press release from the governor, the goal was to impact around 33 thousand students and a total of 132 thousand participants including teachers and parents (Departamento de la Familia, 2011). The method of *Promesa de Hombre*, according to the newspaper articles collected for this analysis, was as a series of workshops offered in the public schools of the Island focusing on fostering key aspects of the various roles exercised by men, such as father, teacher, and role model for children (“Fortuño distribuirá 33,000 mochilas,” 2011; Lenín López, 2011; Rivera Vargas, 2011). In other words, the assumption behind the campaign was to teach boys, and only boys, to respect girls and women to prevent violent behavior from an early age. The teachers would be the ones expected to teach those values.

The tenor of the campaign can be seen through the following TV advertisement: Inspiring music starts playing and a *flamboyán* tree is seen. A series of males appear in the advertisement in descending ages. First, an older man appears and looks at the camera while the word *sabiduría*, wisdom, fades in and fades out. A younger man appears on the screen and the word *integridad*, integrity, fades in and fades out. A man younger than the last two appears on the screen and the word *amor*, love, fades in and fades out. A younger man appears on the screen and the words *respeto* and *fidelidad*, respect and fidelity, fade in and fade out. Another young man appears with the word *honestidad*, honesty. A much younger man appears at the same time as the sentence *Puerto Rico: los verdaderos valores nos llevan a una mejor sociedad*, Puerto Rico: the real values lead us to a better society. After this, a boy appears on the screen followed by the older man who appeared at the beginning. The voice of governor Fortuño can be heard in

the background saying, “*Los valores que demuestras con tu conducta son los que te hacen grande. La promesa de ser un verdadero hombre.*” The values you demonstrate with your behavior are what make you great. The promise of being a real man.

The Department of the Family logo appears on the screen. The end.

Perhaps in order to include girls or as a complementary campaign with *Promesa de Hombre*, Fortuño created a program called *Tus Valores Cuentan* (or your values matter). According to the Josephson Institute,²⁶ *Tus Valores Cuentan* is a program implemented in the schools of Puerto Rico that “includes training and materials to help schools create a culture to achieve three inter-related objectives”: academic achievement, personal growth, and safety (“*Tus valores cuentan,*” 2010). Nevertheless, in a statement about this program the Josephson Institute indirectly speaks against the initiatives that the OPM wanted to implement:

It is important to know that *Tus Valores Cuentan* is not a curriculum that replaces any existing part of the academic program. It is, instead, a framework that allows teachers to integrate values in everyday lessons and activities in a manner that enhances rather than interferes with the school’s other goals. (“*Tus valores cuentan,*” 2010)

Clearly, this statement highlights the fact that, in comparison to a curriculum with a gender perspective that strives for inclusivity, *Tus Valores Cuentan* is a program that creates a conversation about values without changing them.

A short film titled *Tus Valores Cuentan*, created by the Office of the Governor, shows that the goals of the program were achieved. In over four minutes, the film presents how the program was implemented in the school Inés María Mendoza located in Caimito, a rural *barrio* of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Various teachers and parents, as well as Fortuño, speak about the wonderful results of the program, including the cessation of fights and vandalism. The film ends

with lawyer Zulma R. Rosario Vega, Executive Director of the Office of Government Ethics of Puerto Rico, saying that the goal of *Tus Valores Cuentan* is to “retomar al verdadero puertorriqueño,” return to the true Puerto Rican (Jvvideoedits, 2012). Rosario Vega does not explain in the video what she means by “true” Puerto Rican. However, the film begins with Luis Fortuño saying that with this campaign he aims to help people wanting to excel—“*que son gente buena, de buen corazón*,” good, kindhearted people. Next the director of the school points out that the students are good people looking to succeed, yet there are various problems affecting the student body, such as bad discipline, absenteeism, and fights between students. After the director, two teachers mention more of the issues faced in the school: teen pregnancy, dropouts, and families headed by single mothers or parents going through divorce.

In the film, two elements are presented as part of the campaign: (1) the “good” people whom Fortuño intends to target with *Tus Valores Cuentan*, and (2) the characteristics of the students and families presenting the need to receive more “help.” There are several ways in which these elements should be addressed; however, my critique focuses on how the perspective of the “true” Puerto Rican echoes patriarchal discourses from the past and the good/bad oppositional dynamic in which this campaign operates. First, the idea of the “true,” “good,” “kindhearted” Puerto Rican conjures the image of the “national family” presented in the discourses of the Creole elite during the 19th and 20th centuries (see Chapter Two). This image of the national family mimics the traditional nuclear family and its emphasis on following a heteropatriarchal hierarchy. This is apparent in the way teen pregnancy, divorces, and single mothers are presented as negative characteristics affecting the values of the students. These social issues disrupt the “ideal” family, while there is no mention in the video of the way *Tus Valores Cuentan* deals with these “problems.” Second, one can speculate that the “true” Puerto

Rican is represented by anybody who does not fall into any of the categories in which to be undisciplined means to be a problem.

While *Tus Valores Cuentan* seemed to be one of Fortuño's successes, *Promesa de Hombre* ended up in legal trouble. An audit done in 2015 showed that over 900 thousand dollars were used for the purchase of materials for this campaign; however, there was no evidence that such materials were distributed. In addition, that purchase did not go through the bidding process as required by the government (Maldonado Arrigoitia, 2015). Both projects were strongly opposed by feminist, human rights, and LGBT organizations due to the exclusive heteropatriarchal beliefs they encouraged. For example, feminist sociologist Sara Benítez Delgado claimed that *Promesa de Hombre* adopted characteristics similar to Promise Keepers Men's Ministry, a religious organization in the United States professing respect toward women and children living under biblical unity (Roche, 2014). This certainly conflicted with the fact that Puerto Rico is a secular state, which means that it abides by the law of the separation of church and state; yet, *Promesa de Hombre* is a governmental program that emerges from religious principles, which means that this practice violates this separation of religion from politics.

Feminists from the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres* (MAMPR) denounced the problematic basis of *Promesa de Hombre*, arguing that it was a patriarchal initiative with biblical ideologies. Although those with similar ideals to Fortuño might support these ideologies, the MAMPR pointed out how these ideologies can be harmful to women and other historically marginalized communities. Sociologist Benítez Delgado, for example, declared that while *Promesa de Hombre* seems to be a positive campaign where men are exhorted to be "good" and respect others, it promotes what sociological studies have called "*sexismo benévolo*," or benevolent sexism.²⁷ In her words on behalf of the MAMPR, she states:

La campaña Promesa de Hombre es un ejemplo claro de “sexismo benévolo” porque reafirma el rol del hombre fuerte que debe proteger a las mujeres y el rol de la mujer débil que necesita protección. Este tipo de campaña parece otorgar una visión positiva de la mujer, pero al final la estima débil, la considera de forma estereotipada y limitada a ciertos roles tradicionales. Dichos roles, en vez de adelantar la equidad entre mujeres y hombres, lo que hacen es encerrarles en una caja sexista de la cual resulta casi imposible salir sin recibir una reacción violenta. Promesa de Hombre is a clear example of “benevolent sexism” because it reaffirms the role of the man to be strong and protect women and the role of women as weak and in need of protection. This type of campaign seems to give a positive view of women, but ultimately esteems them as weak, limiting women to certain traditional stereotypes and roles. These roles, instead of advancing equality between women and men, what they do is lock them in a sexist box that is almost impossible to leave without receiving a violent reaction. (“Prejuiciada la ‘promesa de hombre,’” 2011)

This statement discloses significant similarities to earlier colonial initiatives seeking to perpetuate traditional gender roles for women—as mothers, wives, and daughters—discussed in the previous chapter. Notably, *Promesa de Hombre* sought to replicate a hegemonic masculinity and femininity rooted in the violent practices that have propped up male heteropatriarchal supremacy for centuries. This statement also reveals closed connections between the “ideal” women valued by Fortuño’s campaign and those desired by colonial authorities. For example, I state in the previous chapter that the ideal(ized) national body was constructed as female, European, white, heterosexual, and bourgeois. *Promesa de Hombre* draws near those colonial standards, except that this campaign aspired to U.S. conservative characteristics—white,

Christian, and heterosexual woman with republican political views.

Although both *Promesa de Hombre* and *Tus Valores Cuentan* could pass initiatives based on a morality of respect, Fortuño justified the religious component of his initiatives noting that such framework had been part of his political agenda since the beginning of his career, and if the majority of Puerto Ricans voted for him, it meant that voters agreed with his beliefs (Rivera Vázquez, 2009). In 2011, Fortuño gave thanks to a religious audience in a speech that reveals the association he makes between moral values and God:

Al comienzo de mi gestión, en momentos bien difíciles, yo sentí que una legión de ángeles me levantó gracias a esas oraciones. Lo único que yo pedía es la sabiduría para hacer, dentro de lo que mi entendimiento era lo correcto, y entiendo que lo correcto entre muchas cosas, es traer los valores y traer a Dios de nuevo a las escuelas. At the beginning of my administration, in rather difficult times, I felt a legion of angels lifting me through those prayers. All I asked is the wisdom to do, what in my understanding is right, and what I think is right among many other things, is to bring values and bring God back to the schools again. (Caquíás Cruz, 2011, para. 7)

When Fortuño says he wants to “bring God back to the schools again,” he may be referring to the five reflective minutes established in 1995 by former governor Pedro Roselló. The five reflective minutes was an order issued by the government allowing students to use the first five minutes in the classroom to raise a prayer to God, to review a biblical or philosophical passage, practice personal or spiritual enrichment, to reflect on their plans that day or their actions of the previous day, or use it to rest (Pitino Acevedo, 1997). In 2009, Fortuño signed the order to put in practice the five reflective minutes again, this time based on “universal” values such as solidarity and prudence (Rivera Vázquez, 2009). In view of the significant attention that *Promesa de Hombre*

gave to conserve traditional gender roles, this five-minute-reflection campaign was intended to promote social issues within the same conservative standards. For instance, this campaign was first announced at a church, to a Christian crowd, with Fortuño giving a speech about “rightness,” saying that what is “right” for him is to bring God to the public schools. Beyond this prophet-like sentiment, a generalized vision of what the majority of Puerto Ricans think about this campaign prevailed when Fortuño stated that his winning the election meant that voters agreed with his moral views. The values highlighted in this and other campaigns under Fortuño’s administration give insight into the important role that moral politics played in fomenting a heterosexist perspective.

A feminist critical analysis of Fortuño’s social campaigns shows that on the surface they presented a commitment to anti-violence. However, Fortuño’s political agenda was openly used to promote a heteronormative, religious, and pro-statehood society. *Promesa de Hombre* and *Tus Valores Cuentan* are strong examples of social projects promoting homophobia, prejudice, and patriarchal beliefs. Fortuño wanted to create a national image that represented the United States’ conservative ideals: the image of nuclear families according to U.S. standards, which is heterosexual, living under biblical rules, and where a woman’s value is defined by compliance to traditional gender roles. While promoting these programs, Fortuño ignored the OPM’s anti-violence initiatives, reduced its budget, and restructured its administration.

Promesa de Hombre and *Tus Valores Cuentan* were parallel projects to those already provided by the OPM, but with a patriarchal ideology at many levels. Although both projects promoted moral values, *Promesa de Hombre* made several assumptions that were problematic from the perspective of the OPM supporters. First, it presented men as a solely heterosexual group, ignoring race, class, and age, among other identities and differential dynamics of power.

Second, it assumed that only men are “violent”; thus, this is the only appropriate group to be “educated” about how to prevent gender violence. Targeting only men as aggressors is problematic in several ways: It omits the fact that although most aggressors against their partners are male, it is possible for women to be violent toward men; it suggests that women are always the “victim,” weak, inferior, and in need of protection; and it also evades the conversation about violence in same-sex relationships. Third, to ask men to “promise” to behave according to social standards and avoid mistreating their partners trivializes gender violence as a private matter and ignores its many manifestations. These assumptions flow from neoliberal practices disguised as projects serving social problems and superseding women’s issues in Puerto Rico. Under Fortuño’s administration, women and other underrepresented communities were pushed to the margins of his conservative campaigns, putting women and other people experiencing gender violence in greater danger.

Conclusion

This chapter explored attacks against the OPM as examples of neocolonial practices that align with colonial ideals of the female body and have neoliberal outcomes that place women’s safety as a secondary issue. The OPM emerged as a place of feminist possibility, yet the attacks against this office and the changes that followed the attacks revealed the limitations of governmental projects like this one. Although the OPM achieved governmental powers that no other feminist organization had until then, this did not prevent governmental authorities from monitoring and eventually controlling the office. As soon as the OPM did not conform to patriarchal standards and disrupted violent practices of the state, political leaders worked to dismantle it.

The past and the present intersect in the midst of these partisan politics of Puerto Rican party leaders. Where once the regimes entered Puerto Rico to take over its land and its people, now we see Carlos Pesquera *conquering* and *raping* the OPM, breaking the glass door, targeting an office concerned with women's issues, pushing people, and making his way with the U.S. flag to prove that he could colonize the OPM. Where once liberal reformists and soldiers "sanitized," sterilized, and regulated women's bodies and sexuality, now we can see Luis Fortuño creating laws and social projects and redefining the role of the OPM to defend his conservative ideals. These strategies done at different times perpetuate similar colonial conditions in which women play an important role as a subjugated group.

The contemporary manifestations of the ideal(ized) national body are evident through the neoliberal outcomes of the attacks against the OPM and, as extension, women. The politicians involved in these incidents were more concerned about their parties' interests than people's safety. Pesquera accomplished his goal of hoisting the U.S. flag and appeared pleased at his heroic feat while leaving a trail of chaos behind him. Fortuño engaged in a series of attacks characterized by his neoliberal purposes: the creation of "anti-violence" initiatives that opposed and minimized the existent initiatives of the OPM, the re-appointment of the *Procuradora* of the OPM until the person matched his religious-conservative ideologies, and the promotion of policies that limited the value of people based only on traditional gender roles. Moreover, the reasoning behind these attacks had discriminatory implications. Pesquera claimed that it was his "democratic" right to use violence, and Fortuño used the promotion of "values" in order to normalize traditional gender roles and gendered stereotypes.

All things considered, these attacks reveal how concepts of nation developed in a colonized island. These concepts took different forms of expression. Pesquera illustrated his

concept of the nation through the need to honor the U.S. flag and keep it hoisted next to the Puerto Rican flag. Fortuño employed his authority to promote the image of a nation that fit into U.S. conservative standards. Nevertheless, in addition to representing the same political party, both politicians based their concepts of the nation on heteropatriarchal standards that police female bodies. Certainly, “policing has functioned historically to facilitate and secure U.S. control in Puerto Rico, first as a colonial prize of war and now as a neocolonial commonwealth territory” (Lebrón, 2012, p. 15). Governmental authorities participating in the attacks discussed in this chapter functioned as a first level of operation by elaborating an ideal(ized) national body that is obedient, lacking agency, weak, and in need of protection. Otherwise, the female body is reduced to a space that can be invaded. The next chapter provides a description of the feminist street performances shifting these heteronormative views of the female body into a broader perspective.

Coda

Since 2006 Puerto Rico has been in a state of economic crisis, straining the neocolonial mask to its limits and thus revealing the colonial reality beneath it. More than 86 thousand Puerto Ricans moved to the United States between 2014 and 2015—the Puerto Rican population outside of the Island surpassing that within the Island. As I finish this dissertation, Wanda Vázquez continues to be the *Procuradora* of the OPM, although I perceive—and based on conversations with feminists in the Island—that the position currently does not hold as many political powers due to little public exposure. Rather, the OPM is in a state of limbo because, first, the OPM has lost all credibility among feminist movements, and second, the *Procuradora* has little influence or grip on other governmental and private agencies. In the meantime, acts of gender-based

violence continue to occur on a regular basis in the Island. In addition, in June 2016 the U.S. Congress passed a bill that authorizes the formation of a fiscal control board with wide-ranging powers to run Puerto Rico's economy. Ironically, the bill was called PROMESA.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Feminist Street Performances as Alternative Imaginaries

In this chapter I present feminist street performances functioning as alternative imaginaries shifting the heteropatriarchal discourses and practices of the ideal(ized) national body presented in the last two chapters into a more inclusive narrative of the female body. As previously stated, feminist street performances are grassroots practices making visible a plurality of women's identities and experiences, acknowledging that everyone does not experience oppression the same way. *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, for example, highlighted the lack of governmental attention to the issues of various communities, including victims of domestic violence, immigrants, unemployed female family providers, victims of sexual aggression, homeless women, HIV/AIDS and breast cancer survivors, and lesbians. This denunciation set the stage for a visual statement of issues relevant to social identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality.

The feminist street performances included in this chapter are *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, *Ponte En Mi Falda*, and *Silueta de Mujer*. These street performances occurred in Puerto Rico during 2009 and were motivated by common indignations: gender-based murders and the attacks by governmental authorities on women's safety. The bodies of the performers played a critical role in serving "as both the message and the vehicle" (Taylor & Constantino, 2003, p. 22). It is through their bodies that the denunciations were made visible, yet their bodies also served as the tools of this denunciation. Due to the emphasis that this study gives to the female body, I focus my analysis on the way that the body is used in feminist street performances as a tool for political action. Both *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* and *Silueta de Mujer* were performed by female-identified bodies. In the case of *Ponte En Mi Falda*, the performer identifies as male, but there were also female-identified bodies playing a crucial role in the

performance. It is important to emphasize that the feminist activists that participated in these street performances are not articulating the need for a different nation or asking for the elimination of the OPM. Instead, they are claiming the need for a different form of governmentality and an alternate approach of organizing themselves to eradicate gender-based violence.

In this chapter I address the following research questions: (1) What are some examples of contemporary feminist street performances that denounce gender violence? (2) How do feminist street performances transform heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative imaginaries shifting the ideal(ized) national body? In order to answer these questions I divided this chapter into four sections. *Section One: Ponte En Mi Falda* and *Section Two: Silueta de Mujer* describe these two specific performances. The description of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* is not included in this chapter because it was described in the introduction of this study. *Section Three: Alternative Imaginaries Shifting the Ideal(ized) National Body* includes an analysis of two aspects of alternative imaginaries: embodiment and the occupation of space. This is based on a visual literacy analysis of the feminist street performances. Art and performance scholars commonly use this term to interpret, comprehend, and make meaning of images. In this study I refer to visual literacy as an interpretation of the feminist street performances. I include images, videos, newspaper articles, and oral histories that I conducted that document the feminist street performances as the main sources of my analysis. This chapter concludes with *Section Four: Impact and Closing Remarks About Feminist Street Performances*, which discusses the impact of these feminist street performances from the perspective of the performers, and also addresses the performances as alternative imaginaries.

Section One: Ponte En Mi Falda

Monumento a la Herencia Taína is a statue of an Indigenous woman that stands at one of the entrances to the city of Caguas, Puerto Rico. It was beside this icon that, in 2009, performer, activist, and theater educator Heriberto Ramírez engaged in an internal conversation with the self to find answers to questions about the construction of masculinity and its connection to gender violence. In 2008, the year before this performance was done, the OPM reported that 26 women²⁸ had been murdered by their partners or ex-partners in cases of gender-based violence (Oficina de la Procuradora, 2009; 2016). This was one of the highest annual numbers of murders during the first decade of the 21st century. Ramírez had been reflecting on gender violence for a long time, including its different manifestations like hate crimes against transgender women and gays. There was a sense of impotence and frustration that made him choose masculinity as a starting point to generate a change in himself, and bring a message of social transformation through this performance.

Ramírez began the performance on July 25, 2009, and, without knowing the path he would follow or the time it would take, he walked for nine days. Ramírez embodied the archetype of the *hermitaño*—or hermit in English—walking the streets of the Island wearing a skirt and using a staff and a lit lantern.²⁹ However, the idea of using the figure of the hermit began long before the execution of the performance. The skirt was the first element to be considered, and it marked the first part of the performance (Figure 3). Ramírez was about to leave for Brazil to participate in and facilitate theater workshops alongside people from all around the world. The idea of the skirt took hold before he left Puerto Rico, and was designed and created by a female friend. He packed the skirt and took it with him to Brazil. Once there,

the skirt traveled through many women's hands. Women used it as a canvas of celebration and transformation, a space where women intervened in various ways.

Todas hicieron una intervención ya fuera gráfica, ya fuera de costura, ya fuera de honrarla, ya fuera de cantarle, ya fuera de danzar con ella. All women made an intervention, whether drawing it, sewing it, honoring it, singing to it, or dancing with it.

(H. Ramírez, personal communication, September 5, 2013)

During this process of interventions, Ramírez discovered ecofeminism. For the first time, he found a space that connected his dedication to ecological causes and feminism as a powerful philosophical foundation to understand women's perspectives in relation to the body and nature.



Figure 3. Heriberto Ramírez wearing the skirt of *Ponte En Mi Falda*. By Gabriel Vallecillo, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

After Brazil, Ramírez returned to Puerto Rico and began to develop the second part of the performance, which consisted of a pilgrimage to rethink the social construction of masculinity and gender binaries. The skirt was a key element of that transformative work, representing the clothes of the hermit in his search for self-discovery and new directions. The *cayado*—or staff in English—was a symbolic and aesthetic element that opened the way to his journey. The *quinqué*—or lit lantern—had two symbolic purposes:

El quinqué era en vigilia por todas las mujeres que han muerto bajo mano del patriarcado, no. Es un acto de solidaridad y de reverencia hacia todas esas mujeres, pero también pensando en que ya van a ser las últimas, ya paró, tu sabes ¡YA! Tú sabes, yo estoy haciendo de agente catalizador para que entonces esa luz de ahora en adelante sea la que ilumine ese nuevo masculino para poder trabajar de otra manera, eh, con el femenino, con las mujeres. The lit lantern was a vigil for all women who have died under the hands of patriarchy. It is an act of solidarity and reverence for all these women, but also thinking that this is the last one, that the violence has stopped, you know, ENOUGH! You know, I'm acting as a catalyst agent so that light from now on is illuminating that new masculine in order to work differently with the feminine, with women. (H. Ramírez, personal communication, September 5, 2013)

These props accompanied him during those nine days. In addition, a collaborator in the performance named Gabriel Vallecillo maintained a website, <http://www.ponteenmifalda.com>,³⁰ that allowed people to keep track of Ramírez's trajectory.

During the morning of July 25 Ramírez put on the skirt, took the staff and lit lantern in his hands, and stood in front of *Monumento a la Herencia Taína*. For him this represented the ancestral memory that would give a start to his journey in the streets. He made a reverent gesture

by standing in front of the statue and blowing a conch as a sign that marked the beginning of his pilgrimage. He then began to walk in silence. Immersed in his thoughts, the performer initiated a slow process of transformation advocating for the end of *machismo*, the recontextualization of traditional masculinities³¹ that co-exist in harmony with the rest of the world, and the end of gender violence. The path where he was headed was uncertain.

When people learned about the performance, various women contacted Vallecidos to offer lodgings to Ramírez during this journey as well as share with him their personal experiences. The integration of women into the performance directed him toward various towns of the Island, including Caguas, Trujillo Alto, Carolina, Loíza, various parts of San Juan (Río Piedras and Santurce), and Guaynabo, all part of the larger metropolitan area. The location of each stop was chosen based on where the women who were inviting him over lived. Ramírez walked during the day to visit a new house and listen to the women's stories. These visits transformed the performance into an organic process of coexistence. Ramírez considered this process as one that gave him access to the "*multi-universo femenino*," or feminine multi-universe. This feminine multi-universe revealed to him spaces in which these women were powerful on a daily basis. These were also spaces from which women defied patriarchal norms through their work. The stories that each woman shared were documented on the web page of the performance. This documentation includes photos and pieces written by the women when Ramírez visited them.

One woman, for example, shared with the performer her knowledge of organic food. She invited him to collect the food from her garden and use it that evening to cook. They prepared a *Calalú*—or Callaloo—a traditional African dish (Figure 4). He also visited Carla Cavina—one of the first, if not the first, filmmaker of lesbian films in Puerto Rico—who shared with the

performer her experiences making movies. During the visit, Ramírez also watched one of her films. On another occasion, a woman shared her experiences and pictures of a natural childbirth. Later, a painter and psychologist had more conversations with him and painted what she thought was the essence of *Ponte En Mi Falda*. This followed other events such as a reading of goddess cards by another woman; a dance of bomba music using the skirt with the group Tamboricua; aqua-aerobics at the beach of Loíza with a group of women; planting *yuca*—or cassava—with another woman, who shared her experiences as an activist; and a meeting with the Creative Director of *Mujer Cambiante*—or Changing Woman—Tania Rosario, with whom the performer walked into a sand maze, where he listened to Rosario’s understanding of the menstruation cycle and its connection to nature.



Figure 4. Heriberto Ramírez eating Calalú with one of the women he visited during the performance. By Gabriel Vallecillo, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

Ramírez then walked to the town of Río Piedras. There, he met with an agriculturist who used car tires as plant pots. He explains how this experience made him reflect about the link between the land and the feminine.

. . . *también es como, eh, reusando, trabajando con agricultura orgánica sin, eh, de una manera consciente, no, sin estar echándole cosas pesticidas ni nada que contamine la tierra, que, la tierra, que es femenina, que es mujer, ahí ya estoy pensando, verdad, en el concepto de ecofeminismo.* This is also something like, recycling, working with organic agriculture in a conscious way, without pesticides or anything that pollutes the earth, the earth, which is female, that is a woman, and I'm thinking there of the concept of ecofeminism. (Ramírez, personal communication, September 5, 2013)

The last stop was in Hato Rey, in the organic food cooperative *Madre Tierra*—or Mother Earth. On August 2, 2009, he decided to invite other men and women to an event that marked the end of this performance. The event, titled *Caminata del Poder*, or power walk, was a performance walking from Hato Rey to Santurce wearing skirts (Figure 5). This was approximately a 2.6-mile walk that ended in front of the Centro de Bellas Artes Luis A. Ferré, where the art piece *Musas* is installed (Figure 7). *Musas* was created by artist Annex Burgos and consists of nine 6-foot-tall figures of female muses, inspired by the Muses of Greek mythology, who represent the arts of the Caribbean: song, dance, literature, architecture, design, visual arts, film, music, and theater. Various feminist and social justice movements joined Ramírez on this walk, such as Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico (MAMPR), Todos y Todas por Puerto Rico, Movimiento Gay, Grito de los Excluidos, Movimiento de los Foros, and Sociales. Interestingly, messages from the feminist movements were included in this part of the performance (Figure 6). Men were holding signs that read “*Procuradora Feminista Ahora*,” or A Feminist *Procuradora* Now, and



Figure 5. The performer interacting with another man who joined him in the performance. From *Primera Hora*, by Bárbara J. Figueroa Rosa, August 3, 2009



Figure 6. Heriberto Ramírez with other men holding signs. By Noralis Rodríguez Coss, from *El Nuevo Día* newspaper, August 3, 2009.



Figure 7. Closing Caminata del Poder at the Centro de Bellas Artes Luis A. Ferré in Santurce. By Gabriel Vallecillo, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

another one that advocates for women's employment saying "*No a los despidos, trabajadoras al poder*," No to layoffs, women employees to power. As we will see in the description of *Musas Desprovisitas y Sin Sostén*, these messages were part of the political moment in which the feminist movements were asking the *Procuradora* of the OPM to resign, and there were also protests around issues of employment due to *Ley 7*, described in the introduction of this study. The closure of *Ponte En Mi Falda* included the work of Jennifer Arriaga, who wrote a poem about the skirt and made a symbolic *tenderete*—or clothesline—with the poetry written on paper by the rest of the participants.

Section Two: Silueta de Mujer

On the morning of December 28, 2009, a truck with speakers parked in front of the OPM. The truck belonged to the Solidarity Program of *Unión de Trabajadores de la Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica* (ProSol UTIER), a labor union of workers in the electric power system of the Island. They were there to support the performance that was about to happen. Other groups that supported the performance included the *Teatro Callejero* and *Masfaldas* collectives, *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres*, *La Juntilla*, *Caucus de la Mujer del Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores*, and *Sindicato Puertorriqueño de Trabajadores* (SPT) (Acevedo, 2009). The police arrived moments after the *Sindicato* arrived because of the signals that there was going to be a protest. In the meantime, the performers were meeting in another part of town to travel together to the site. It was close to 7:00 a.m. when a passenger van approached the vicinity of the OPM. Inside the van the performers were talking about logistics when they saw officers in the area. In that moment the performers needed to make a difficult decision. They had to decide whether to cancel the performance or risk arrest.

This performance, titled *Silueta de Mujer*, was demanding the resignation of the OPM's *Procuradora*, former judge Yvonne Feliciano. According to the spokeswomen of the performance, feminist lawyer Ana Irma Rivera Lassén and psychologist Dr. Milagros Colón, the Women's Advocate demonstrated negligence and a lack of commitment when implementing work plans for the rights of victims of domestic violence (Acevedo, 2009). Members of the supporting groups were participating as performers or waiting at the site to block the street and stop traffic. The performers were mostly women, heads of families, students, university professors, entrepreneurs, modern dancers, sociologists, psychologists, social workers, artists, photographers, and musicians (Acevedo, 2009).



Figure 8. The performers of *Siluetas de Mujer* take positions on the street. By

Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from

<http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

After discussing whether they should leave or stay, the performers decided “*¡Vamos a hacerlo!*” Let’s do it! Quickly, they jumped out of the van and lay down on the pavement, right in front of the OPM’s doors, and took their planned positions (Figure 8). Each performer represented the silhouette of a victim murdered by *violencia machista* in Puerto Rico.³² In order for the performers to embody the silhouettes, they had to investigate each person’s particular case.

Each one had a sign close to his or her body with a victim’s name and date of death. This gesture was intended to humanize the person who was murdered, presenting each victim as more than a statistic and attempting to move away from normalizing violence. So far that year more than 17 women, and at least one man, had been assassinated in cases of gender-based violence.³³

Each performer represented one of those people to illustrate violence as continuous and collective. In the words of the person who proposed this performance, Elga Ester García, each silhouette:

“es una reverencia, es una, es un acto de despedida, no, es un memorial, de decir, o sea, estoy allí en plena Ponce de León” is a reverence, an act of farewell, a memorial, to say, rather, I am there in the middle of Ponce de León Avenue. (personal communication, September 7, 2013)

The performers embodied the bodies of those who are gone but should not be forgotten, especially by the organizations that had the mission but not the resources to prevent their deaths.



Figure 9. Activists drawing the silhouettes on the street. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

Figure 9 shows the performer representing Elida Rios Montañez, who died on April 22, 2009 (activist on her knees wearing a white shirt and jeans), and whose body was found between a lamppost and a generator after she unsuccessfully attempted to flee from her partner (Caro González, 2009b). This case received a lot of media attention, not only because of the brutality of her assassination but also because of the way the media covered it: Photographs of her body taken at the crime scene appeared on the front pages of newspapers of the Island.



Figure 10. The representation of a male victim in *Silueta de Mujer*. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

Figure 10 shows the one man in this performance, who represented Jaime Rivera Santana. According to newspaper reports about this case, Rivera Santana intervened when his cousin's husband tried to kill her. The media reported that while the woman, María del Pilar Rivera Rosado, was cooking, the murderer, Francisco Castro Rosario, entered the kitchen and

burned her with hot oil. He was beating her when Rivera heard the screams and intervened to help her. The murderer was a security guard and used his service weapon to shoot Rivera Santana, killing him before fleeing from the scene (Hernández Pérez, 2009). *Silüeta de Mujer* made those and other cases visible to the *Procuradora* as a call for action. A temporary roadblock also caused pedestrians and drivers on the street to stop and observe the performance.

While the performers lay on the ground, others drew a white line around each body with spray paint, similar to the way authorities do at crime scenes (Figure 10). Other people held banners that read, “*El amor no mata, el machismo sí*,” Love does not kill, but machismo does, and “*No somos objeto, merecemos respeto*,” We are not an object, we deserve respect (Figure 11).



Figure 11. One of the activists of *Silüeta de Mujer* protesting. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

While the white outlines were being sprayed, the spokeswomen described the scene of the performance in relation to the Women's Advocator's silence each time a woman was killed:

[Las formas de los cuerpos] Se quedan aquí regadas por las flores que le debemos a sus tumbas para que la licenciada Yvonne Feliciano no las olvide. Para que en honor a ellas deje su puesto a alguna persona que tenga la conciencia y el compromiso de desarrollar plenamente una oficina que tiene que servir a los intereses de todas las mujeres que habitan nuestra isla. The body outlines stay here marked by the flowers we owe to their graves, so that Yvonne Feliciano does not forget them. So that in their honor, she hands over her position, and leaves her job to any person who has the awareness and commitment to fully develop an office that has to serve the interests of all women who inhabit our island. (Acevedo, 2009)



Figure 12. Activists display a banner to the drivers who are about to pass over the silhouettes. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

Two women showed a banner that said, “*Guíe despacio . . . adelante cuerpos victimas del machismo 2009*,” (Drive slowly . . . bodies of the victims of machismo in 2009 ahead) to the drivers who were waiting in the blocked street (Figure 12). As they waited, they watched the outlines being drawn around the bodies on the street. García remembers how the drivers wondered if there was a crime scene or if something else had happened. She adds:

Cuando los carros empezaron a pasar [por los cuerpos], pues era como una cuestión de decir, tú sabes, estoy pasando [por las siluetas], porque tú estas acostumbrado a ver [esas marcas] en las películas, esos cadáveres en el piso, no. Así que después de un poco tú pasas y dices, mataron a veinte, mataron a to’ esta gente aquí ayer, qué paso, no, este . . . pero fue así, eso fue lo que ocurrió. When the cars began to move and pass through the silhouettes, it was as a matter of saying, you know, I’m passing by, because one is used to seeing those marks in the movies, those corpses on the ground. So after a while, one says, there were 20 killed, all these people were killed here yesterday, what happened? . . . but it was so, that’s what happened. (personal communication, September 7, 2013)

García’s account of what the drivers might have been thinking reveals the reason for outlining the bodies on the street. The intent was to cause drivers to question why they had been stopped, and then see the aftermath of the performance as they passed. It was a way to make the violence more real to the spectator. García mentions how when a woman is killed, “*Te lloran y no importa, siguen viviendo y siguen pasando*,” They cry for you and it does not matter, they continue living and moving forward (personal communication, September 7, 2013). She claims

that often people do not stop to think about the seriousness of the issue of *violencia machista*.

This performance succeeded in making them stop to think about the victims.

The performance lasted approximately 30 minutes, although the performers stayed for only five minutes. Once the outlines of their bodies had been drawn on the street, they stood up and left in the van that originally had dropped them off. The banner that was shown to the drivers was installed on the street for others to read as they passed by the body marks.



Figure 13. Collaborators of *Siluetas de Mujer* display the *tenderete* in front of the OPM. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

After the performance was over, some of the supporters stayed at the site and made a *tenderete*—a clothesline—with the signs that had the information about the victims and displayed it by the sidewalk in front of the OPM (Figure 13). Some time after the performers left,

Feliciano arrived at the OPM and talked to the press covering the performance. While she talked, the protesters sang choruses of, “*Ahora, ahora, renuncia Procuradora*” Now, now, resign *Procuradora* (Caro González, 2009a, p. 12). Feliciano denied the protester’s argument that her office was not doing enough for the victims:

Yo no voy a renunciar, nosotros estamos haciendo nuestro trabajo en defensa de todas las mujeres. Nuestra oficina esta abierta para brindarle la ayuda que necesitan. I will not resign, we are doing our work in defense of all women. Our office is open to provide the help they need. (Caro González, 2009a, p. 12)

Feliciano did not talk to the protesters. Ironically, the police officers who were still at the site fined Feliciano for blocking the road with her car (Caro González, 2009b). Eventually, the protesters left. The *tenderete* was left behind, moving with the wind and displaying the names of the victims to the passersby until somebody took it down. The body marks that were drawn on the road stayed there for days as silent reminders. Slowly the cars and the weather made them disappear.

Section Three: Alternative Imaginaries Shifting the Ideal(ized) National Body

This section addresses how feminist street performances serve as alternative imaginaries shifting the ideal(ized) national body. This shift occurs when activists interrogate “the politics of representation and the strategies of power written across the female body” by colonial and governmental authorities (Taylor & Constantino, 2003, p. 22). Urban ethnographer Cindy Cruz (2001) acknowledges that this interrogation “is a necessary process of reclaiming and re-imagining the histories and forms of agency of women who are unrepresented and unheard” (p. 663). There is an internal struggle when interrogating forces of power over the female body

between what one has learned and what needs to be changed. This interrogative process results in “a new form of identity/body—a body that is ground in the interrogation of positionality” (Cruz, 2001, p. 663). In other words, the body takes new directions and actions.

The aim of this section is to explore how that interrogation of power occurs through both embodiment and the occupation of space. In Chapter One, I presented these as the two aspects of the way feminist street performances work as a second level of operation in the Island. In this chapter I analyze these two aspects, recognizing that each performance uses different strategies to express the performers’ indignations. Thus, I look into each of these aspects for each feminist street performance, and conclude with a more cohesive analysis.

I analyze embodiment as an act of visibility in feminist street performances. In addition, as a contemporary mode of resistance, these performances intervene in the public space by composing installations of gender violence where spectators become “ethical witnesses” (Fregoso, 2014, p. 591). In this sense, feminist activists make a call for action and dialogue with and among the witnesses. By doing this, they challenge the “witnesses” to think about gender identities. Through both embodiment and the occupation of space, feminist activists challenge the ideal(ized) national body because it allows them to question, re-invent, legitimize, and re-contextualize their meanings of the female body and the space they occupied.

Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén

The image of the *Musas* standing on the sidewalk could seem surreal yet substantial to the eyes of the passersby. The *Musas* from whom I have collected oral histories recall a hollow silence on the day of the performance. Some remember people crying, astonished by the image of their bodies standing together, and the clicks and whirs of the cameras from the press. The

Musas each selected a different experience of gender violence to embody, and various artists volunteered to depict those experiences in the form of images painted on the *Musas*' upper bodies.³⁴ The eight *Musas* composed one complicated illustration of the communities ignored by Feliciano, Fortuño's administration, and society as whole. The *Musas* embodied a visual awareness of the multiple stories these images tell. Those stories reveal how violence is experienced differently and within diverse levels of oppression based on the victim's gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity, among other social identities. They also tell us that discourses, reforms, and other political actions that invisibilize women are a form of violence that needs to be denounced. The following is a description of that visual awareness as it appears in Figure 1.

The *Musa* of Domestic Violence is painted in green, and includes artistic elements of a red heart stabbed by a purple knife on her chest, a purple handprint covering almost her entire face, and three figures of children holding hands in red on her stomach. The *Musa* of Immigration is painted in blue and purple. A painted fence covers almost her entire face and chest. Through the holes in the fence one can notice eyes painted, as if there are people watching from the other side. The *Musa* of Female Heads of Families has a blue face, her upper chest is painted in white and her lower chest is painted in blue with waves symbolizing a body of water. Inside the water there are scattered letters that form the word *poverty* twice. A red hand emerges from the surface of the water, as if the person is drowning in poverty. The *Musa* of Sexual Aggression has two white ribbons representing girlhood. Her face and chest are painted white, and from her abdomen a phallic gun rises, pointing to her face. There is one red handprint on her face and another and one on her chest. Homeless women are represented by a *Musa* with her face painted in blue with a sun representing the daytime. Her body is painted black with a broken red

umbrella across her chest. A blue woman sits beneath it with blue water drops that fall from the *Musa*'s neck and slip through the umbrella, wetting the blue woman and falling into a blue vase. Survivors of Breast Cancer are represented by a *Musa* painted in a dark green with colorful flowers on her chest that grow from her waist up. Her face is painted with a yellow butterfly and her hair is arranged with tropical flowers. The *Musa* of HIV/AIDS survivors has a big red ribbon drawn on her white-painted chest. Two black birds stand on her lower stomach and a red butterfly flies on her upper chest. Her face is painted in black with a white butterfly standing on her left cheek. The last of the *Musas* represents lesbian communities. She has two women on her chest looking at each other. A line creating two separate sides, one in red and the other in green, separates the women. The split is evident from her face to her stomach. Across her stomach is written the phrase "*Los besos perdidos/prohibidos*," or Lost/forbidden kisses.

Taken together, the images on the bodies are a collective interpretation that evokes prevailing themes in the Island and informs the meanings of violence and survival from a Puerto Rican woman's perspective. The torso-canvas is the site of struggle but also the site of political action. Both the images and the bodies become one in this composition. Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, spokeswoman for the performance, told the press:

Este performance inserta el cuerpo como mecanismo de expresión y de denuncia en un momento donde cada grupo afectado por las acciones de Fortuño, quiere denunciar, quiere advertir su descontento. Esta es la utilización del arte para expresamos en contra de las políticas que se ejecutan desde el gobierno en contra de las mujeres. This performance inserts women's bodies as a mechanism of expression and discontent to denounce how Fortuño's politics have affected various groups of women. We are making

use of art to speak out against policies the government executed against women.

(Rosario, 2009, para. 3)

This statement highlights the importance of the political context for this performance, which took place at that specific site in that particular moment in history. The *Musas*' toplessness was a symbolic political response to a feeling of dispossession. The bodies were the tool employed to voice that feeling. Nevertheless, this feeling of dispossession was accompanied by a strong sense of resistance through the word *AGRESIÓN*, or aggression, which was spelled out on their backs.



Figure 14: *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* posing in front of the OPM spelling the word *AGRESIÓN*. Archivo CLARIDAD, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

As if the images painted on the fronts of their bodies were not enough, the *Musas* turned their backs to the street to make a clear statement of their denunciations (see Figure 14). *AGRESIÓN* meant the attacks against the OPM by politicians, in particular the way the government transformed the OPM into a more exclusive space following the interests of political agendas, and the dismissal of over 30 thousand government employees that left at least one of the *Musas* and hundreds of other women without jobs. In other words, these aggressions meant

that women were going to have less access to resources, which by extension increased their risk of poverty, inadequate healthcare, and experiencing violence, which could literally kill them. In addition, the silence of the *Procuradora* was another form of *AGRESIÓN* that promoted the exclusion of those communities by not addressing their issues. That institution was not in dialogue with women anymore.

While discussing the performance, the *Musas* talked constantly about the concept of the body. The oral histories I collected for this project document some of the issues they considered. For them to expose their bodies in public was a challenge because they knew the images of the performance would be available in media archives. Moreover, several respondents stated that feminists from various organizations resisted the idea of the performance because of the risks involved in using the names of the organizations in a political action that included the use of nudity. Some of the MAMPR members were concerned about the reputations they had carefully built throughout the years and the ideology that exposing the female body is a form of sexual objectification. María Reinat Pumarejo recalls:

Habían personas dentro del Movimiento Amplio que no iban a hacerlo [el performance], pero que, que más allá del momento que vivíamos no iban a aceptarlo como forma de resistencia y expresión. Estaba esa conciencia. Y entonces nosotras decidimos hacerlo por nosotras para no ceder nuestro derecho a hacerlo por cuan conservadora pueda ser una o dos personas dentro del grupo mayor. Sí queríamos explicar lo que íbamos a hacer, pero no lo íbamos a poner a votación en ningún momento. Eso no, no iba a pasar.

There were people within the *Movimiento Amplio* who did not want to do it [the performance], but, beyond the moment that we were living, they were not accepting it as a form of resistance and expression. There was that awareness. And then we decided to

do it for us in order to not cede our right to do it due to how conservative are one or two people within the majoritary group. Yes, we wanted to explain what we were doing to do, but we were not going to bring it up for a vote at any time. That was not going to happen.

(personal communication, September 11, 2013)

After several meetings the performers insisted on the need and importance of the performance to draw attention to the political realities affecting women at that particular moment. They wrote individual statements including their reasons for doing the performance. Zulnette García's (2011) statement says:

Me desnudo, porque esta vez, yo lo elijo, porque nadie me obliga, porque mi cuerpo imperfecto es al final el mismo cuerpo de mis comadres,³⁵ porque mi cuerpo ha vivido experiencias iguales o parecidas a las de mis comadres. Me desnudo para balancear las muchas veces que me han desnudado a mi sin yo elegirlo. Me desnudo como un acto de poder, en un país con pudores extraños. I undress myself because this time, I choose to do it, because nobody forces me, because my imperfect body is the same body of my comadres, because my body has lived equal or similar experiences to those of my comadres. I undress myself to balance the many times my body has been stripped without my consent. I undress myself as an act of power, in a country with oppressive conducts of strange modesty. (para.4)

In this statement García makes a strong connection between nudity and empowerment. She states that her body has been undressed without her consent, and in the performance she is the only one in control of her body. The reclamation of her body comes from this process of interrogation.

This reclamation contrasts with the passive silence of the female body promoted through conceptions of the ideal(ized) national body. This auto-reflection and others that were shared by

the *Musas* offer similar affirmations of the importance of expressing their message through their bodies. This process was well thought out, both individually and collectively.

María Reinat Pumarejo was another respondent who explained the significance of being topless. She said:

Para que nosotros avancemos tiene que haber gente dispuesta a hacer ciertas cosas que reten ese estatus quo. Que reten las actitudes conservadoras. Que diga, no, nos tiramos a la calle y lo dimos todo. Entregamos el cuerpo en ese momento [en el performance]. Por media hora, por 40 minutos, entregamos nuestro cuerpo a la causa, no a un hombre como dicta la socialización sino a un movimiento en un momento histórico de increíble significado humano para la mujer y sus familias. Fue un acto de servicio para muchas de nosotras. No fue un momento de buscar reconocimiento, no fue un momento de nosotros individualmente. Porque, desnudarse, enseñar tu pecho, no es fácil. Sobre todo con las familias que tenemos a veces, conservadoras. Padres, madres, tíos, todos nos están viendo. Va a quedar para la historia un video de cuando tu te desnudaste. Tus tetas van a estar al aire todo el tiempo. Pero en ese momento eso fue lo que nosotros este, por lo menos yo estuve razonando de que había que dar un paso mas allá, había que atreverse a otras cosas, y tenía que ser un grupo bien diverso, jóvenes, mujeres maduras, que representaran distintas causas que se estaban afectando como consecuencia de la Ley 7. La Ley 7 fue un acto tan, fue tan deshumanizante, que no nos quedo mas remedio que hacer . . . por eso lo de desnudas, y desprovistas. Es alegórico al hecho de que, nos dejaron en la prångana, nos dejaron sin nada. Pues mira, que esto es sin nada. Quiero que me veas, lo que se siente lo que es estar sin nada. In order to move forward we must be people willing to do certain things that challenge the status quo. To challenge

conservative attitudes. To say, no, we went to the streets and gave everything for the cause. We delivered our bodies at the performance. For half an hour, 40 minutes, we gave our bodies to the cause, not to a man as our socialization dictated, but to a movement in a historical moment of great human significance for women and their families. For many of us it was an act of service. It was not done to seek recognition, nor an individual moment. Because it is not easy to be naked showing your breasts. Especially when members of our families are conservative. Fathers, mothers, uncles, all of them seeing you. There is going to be a video that will stay for history showing that you were undressed. Your breasts will be on the air all the time. But at that moment is what we, or at least what I was arguing, that we had to take a step further, we had to dare to do other things, and it had to be a very diverse group, young, mature women, which represent different causes that were affected as a result of *Ley 7*. This law was an act that was so dehumanizing, that we had no choice but to do it . . . naked, and dispossessed, which was allegorical to the fact that we were left behind, we were left with nothing. It was like saying, “look, this is nothing. I want you to see, what it feels like to have nothing.”

(personal communication, September 11, 2013)

The bodies of these feminist activists are the tools they chose for their political activism. By talking about the process they deconstructed the social beliefs that up to that moment were inscribed on their bodies. The *Musas* decided to overcome those traditional discourses and confront the shame involved as part of their moral regime. García’s statement reflects this process of deconstruction. She claims authority over her body and explains how the oppression she has experienced is related to the oppression other women’s bodies have also experienced. A sense of autonomy and solidarity echoes in her words. Body image, sexual abuse, and national

encryptions of morality are some of the oppressive issues that resonate in the statement. Like García, Pumarejo also highlights the need to disrupt the shame of being naked, because as a political action it literally reflected the political moment and the social conditions that women were experiencing.

Another respondent, Marielys Burgos, whose mother was also dismissed from her job because of *Ley 7*, says, “*Desnudarse es un acto de auto-reconocimiento, es un acto político cuando se escoge,*” To undress oneself is an act of auto-recognition, it is a political act when it is voluntary.³⁶ Marielys’s words recognize the body as a site of knowledge that detaches itself “from a neocolonial past and into the embodiment of radical subjectivities” (Cruz, 2001, p. 658). Therefore, its agency comes from a critical practice in relationship to the world that surrounds it.

Ponte En Mi Falda

The embodiment of *Ponte En Mi Falda* was based on the archetype of the hermit. The performer used props, such as a skirt featuring women’s illustrations, to send a message about stopping gender violence. He chose to carry out his performance on a public street, knowing that the sight of a man wearing a skirt would provoke people’s curiosity, interrupting their routines and drawing their attention to his message. The skirt was invited to occupy spaces of food production, gender identities, working-class experiences, the embracement of African practices, and women’s cultural production. This unconventional image generated questions of gender identity that provoked several reactions. Ramírez recalls people asking him questions about the skirt. He engaged in short conversations with these people, discussing the meaning of the performance with them and the reasons for wearing the skirt. However, others were not as comfortable seeing him in the street. He explains:

Como yo andaba con un cayado, había gente que iba por una acera se cambiaban de acera, pensaban que era un loco. O era de noche y a veces había gente que hacía esto (hace el gesto físico) como que queriéndome decir “tengo una pistola”. O sea, imagínate al nivel de paranoia que vive la gente que necesita intimidarte o que simplemente necesita este, huir. The fact that I was walking with a staff made people change sidewalks thinking that I was crazy. Or there were nights that sometimes people made a physical gesture to say they were armed with a gun. I mean, imagine the level of paranoia that people felt the need to intimidate or simply flee away. (Ramírez, personal communication, September 5, 2013)

Experiences like these illustrate the visibility of the performer and the meanings people gave to his performances as he passed through their communities. People noticed and/or questioned him. In addition, the impact this image had was magnified in the photos that documented the performance. One of those is Figure 15, which was uploaded on the website of the performance.

In the image we see Ramírez in front of what it seems to be an abandoned house. The front window of the house has the words “*Choki ella es mía,*” or Choki, she is mine. This seems to be a message directed toward somebody named Choki, and although it looks like it is not related to the message of the banner that hangs from the wall, it has an interesting connection from the perspective of the viewer because the person who wrote the message is claiming ownership of a woman. The banner says, “*Dale Gracias a Dios que tienes Hijos no Cuernos, Felicidades Papá,*” or Give thanks to God that you have sons—or children—and not horns, Congratulations Dad. This message is directed to men who are fathers, probably as part of the June celebrations of Father’s Day. The message states that it is better to have children than to be

cheated upon. The heads of the cow and the bull offer a graphic illustration of the horns. Beyond comparing women and men with animals, the attention is placed on their big horns.



Figure 15. Heriberto Ramírez walks in front of an abandoned house. By Gabriel Vallecillo, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

This scenario could be interpreted in many ways, but its patriarchal language is indisputable. Culturally, in Puerto Rico we refer to a person with “*cuernos*,” or horns, as a person who has gone through an experience of infidelity. The language alludes strictly to a heterosexual binary of male/bull and female/cow. The column located at the far right of the house reads “*TÚ*” or You, which could be interpreted as the objectification of the person who has been cheated on.

To feel like a “column” could refer to being left out in the relationship or a disgraceful feeling of loneliness and betrayal. Jealousy and violence go hand in hand with this image. The performer walks by the abandoned house, facing forward, in deep concentration, wearing the skirt and holding the lantern and the staff as he makes his way up the street.

Silueta de Mujer

Silueta de Mujer embodied the 18 victims of acts of gender violence that had been reported up to that point in 2009. The performers stopped the traffic on Ponce de León Avenue, and lay down in the street until their bodies had been outlined with white spray paint (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Silhouettes on the street. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto

Rico, 2009. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2009/12/41033.php>

In preparation for this performance, the activists studied the cases of the people they planned to represent. This process of investigation reflects the performers’ sense of responsibility

in representing actual human beings who were murdered, and it also suggests a refusal to normalize gender violence. The images of the silhouettes were fundamental to visualizing the human loss that gender violence generates. The location of the silhouettes purposely delivered a message to the *Procuradora*. However, it was done in the middle of the street in order to involve spectators in a more intimate experience with gender violence.

The silhouettes composed something similar to a human installation that makes the spectator contemplate violence as a real fact in Puerto Rico. Drivers were forced to pass over the silhouettes of the bodies, which incorporated them as active participants in the performance. Theoretically, the silhouettes are epistemological tools that visually reveal the atrocity of gender violence. In the words of Teresa Córdova Rodríguez, one of the *Musas*:

Y, y yo creo que un poco también eso debió llamar la atención, por lo menos así yo lo concebí, de que mujeres de todas las edades son víctimas de violencia de género, violencia machista y, y está ahí en nuestras caras, en la calle, precisamente. Al igual que el performance estaba ahí en la calle, es que está ahí y no lo estamos viendo, tú sabes. Está en, en, mi vecina lo vive, mi prima lo vive, en pequeñas cosas [que] se viven todos los días.

And, I think that the performance also called the attention, at least that is how I conceived it, that women of all ages are victims of gender violence, *violencia machista*, and it is there in our faces, in the street precisely. Just like the performance was there on the street, it [violence] was there and we are not seeing it, you know. My neighbor lives it, my cousin lives it, it is in the small things that we live every day. (personal communication, September 12, 2013)

As suggested in this statement, the performers indicated with their bodies that there was no difference between the everyday violence and the authorities' lack of action to prevent violence.

Both are systems of violence working in tandem. By giving the victims a hypervisibility through a corporeal approach they validate “the lived experience of the body” (Cruz, 2001, p. 659). By displaying the victims’ names and dates of death the performers resisted forgetting these crimes and reclaimed justice for the victims. In this sense, the bodies were visible in order to honor the stories of the victims. These silhouettes reclaimed the communities that the performers considered invisible in Fortuño’s politics, which translated into all forms of violence. This reclamation is evident in their leaving the silhouettes on the ground as a disturbing reminder of death. Cruz suggests reclamation is significant to make visible the voices and stories of those who are not included in dominant discourses (p. 658). In this instance, the silhouettes were drawn as a reminder of the bodies, as a symbol of the struggle to remain visible. Knowledge, in this case, is a possibility because the narrative of the silhouettes refused to represent an unchanging notion of gender violence.

The silhouettes occupied a public street to, where many of the gender-based aggressions take place. The public space served as a location or stage of resistance. Having the silhouettes on the pavement strategically called out that feminicidal violence³⁷ occurs in Puerto Rico and the authorities are participating as accomplices in such violence by not acting against it. In the words of Teresa Córdova Rodríguez, the performance “*Va directo al grano, y así es la violencia. La violencia es así,*” It goes straight to the point, and so is violence. Violence is like that (personal notification, September 12, 2014). She adds that occupying the public streets points out:

la situación de feminicidio que ha habido en Puerto Rico. Eh, la inacción por parte de las autoridades, por eso se hizo frente a la Procuraduría de la Mujer. The situation of feminicides that have occurred in Puerto Rico. Also the inaction on the part of the

authorities, this is the reason for doing the performance in front of the OPM. (personal communication, September 12, 2013)

Section Four: Impact and Closing Remarks About Feminist Street Performances

After I present this study at conferences and universities, people often ask me if the feminist street performances had some sort of political impact in terms of changing local laws, or if there were partisan reactions to the manifestations. Former *Procuradora* Feliciano's reaction to the street performance *Silueta de Mujer* was the only one documented in the newspapers and mentioned by some of the respondents of this study. However, the respondents emphasized in the oral histories that the goal of the street performances was to create conversation among people about the topics highlighted through their manifestations. Based on this goal and the oral histories, I identified four ways in which the feminist street performances created an impact: (1) personal enrichment, (2) conversations at national and international levels through media coverage, (3) educational purposes, and (4) long-term effects. The following is a discussion about the impact of these feminist street performances from the perspective of the performers in order to present closing remarks on alternative imaginaries.

At the personal level, the influence that the feminist street performances had on each respondent varied. Although each experience was different, I identified two main aspects of personal enrichment mentioned by all respondents: empowerment and feminist mobilization. For example, Zulnette García claims that one of the major impacts of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* was:

Que las mujeres que participamos tuvimos ese proceso de retrospectión con nuestros cuerpos y con lo que implicaba desnudarse [en público]. That the women whom we

participated with went through a process of retrospection with our bodies and what it means to be naked [in public]. (personal communication, September 7, 2013)

Through the process of retrospection, Zulnette refers to the thoughts that she had to overcome when preparing for the performance, including the principles with which she was raised, such as not showing her undressed body in public. Indeed, this was one of the major challenges faced by the activists of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*. Another respondent, Liana Carrasquillo Vázquez, also mentioned that the process of retrospection was an important part of the performance that influenced her as an individual:

[T]odas estas construcciones [de género] que por más que nosotras hayamos deconstruido están in the back of your head, diciéndote, ¿qué tu estas haciendo? Tú sabes, ¡tu cuerpo! ¡el pudor! que esconderte, tú sabes. Por eso te digo, es como, fueron muchas cosas, fueron muchas cosas a la misma vez; la representatividad, el sentimiento, el replanteamiento del cuerpo y de tu cuerpo porque es tu, tú sabes, es tuyo que aunque está representando otras personas es el tuyo, tú sabes. All these gender constructions that as much as we have deconstructed them, they are in the back of your head telling you, what are you doing? You know, your body! Modesty! To hide, you know. So I say, it is like, there were many things, there were many things at once; representativeness, feelings, rethinking the body and about your body, because it is you, you know, it is yours even though it is representing other people, it is yours [the body], you know. (personal communication, April 17, 2013)

The level of intimacy and the experience of the body in the street performance were also understood as things that made them feel more self-confident. In the words of Lourdes Inoa Monegro:

[Y]o creo que, este, es que el performance tiene, tiene un nivel de intimidad que no lo tiene otro accionar político, ¿entiendes? . . . para mí el hacer Musas es un proceso de empowerment . . . así que para mí individualmente, si, para mí tuvo un impacto de reafirmación. I think that, this, the performance has a level of intimacy that one does not have in other political activism, you know? . . . for me doing *Musas* is a process of empowerment . . . so for me individually, if, for me it had an impact of reaffirmation.

(personal communication, April 17, 2013)

These experiences reveal that this street performance challenged feminist activists in ways that other forms of political activism have never done before. Johanna Emmanuelli Huertas adds:

Fue bien importante también para que muchas mujeres se, se re-adueñaran de sus cuerpos, por lo menos mentalmente. Esta percepción de que el cuerpo es mío y mira yo puedo hacer eso. It was also very important for many women so that [they] could re-own their bodies, at least mentally. The perception that the body is mine and [to think] look, I can do that. (personal communication, April 15, 2013)

Besides going through individual processes of retrospection, the participants of this performance shared doubts and conversations about their bodies collectively. In fact, all the respondents from *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* reported that many of the feminists who did not participate as *Musas* lost the fear of showing their bodies in public, and many others mentioned their desire to participate in a future performance.

Something that distinguished *Silueta de Mujer* from the other two performances is that friends and family of the participants, and other ordinary people, were also involved in the organization of the performance. The respondents of this study mentioned that this in particular inspired the participants to see themselves as activists and to continue collaborating on future

events. Elga Ester García Garcillas, one of the organizers and the driver of the passenger van that transported the activists to the OPM, said, “[*La*] gente que yo conozco participó como pudo,” the people I know participated in any way they could. Elga firmly believed that people had the need to do or say something about the issue of gender violence, and because of this there was no problem finding volunteers to participate. One of those participants, Teresa Córdova Rodríguez, found a new path for activism in this performance:

[E]sa fue la primera vez que yo participé en una actividad feminista en mi vida como activista y, y pues fue el pie o el punto de partida para otro tipo de, de actividades o de preocupaciones, no, feministas y, y el hecho de conocer personas que participaron en ese performance también nutre a una en su formación como feminista. That was the first time I participated in a feminist event in my life as an activist, and this marked the starting point for participating in other types of feminist activities or concerns, and the fact of knowing [as in having a relationship with] people who participated in this performance also nourishes one’s formation as a feminist. (personal communication, September 12, 2013)

The personal impact that *Siluetas de Mujer* had on Teresa inspired her to identify herself as a feminist and continue learning about feminism. People without experience doing feminist activism or street performances were able to participate in the artistic composition, logistics, and investigative process of learning about the victims they represented in order to give a more personal and respectful meaning to the representation.

In the case of *Ponte En Mi Falda*, there were various ways in which Heriberto Ramírez felt a personal impact after doing the street performance. One of the things he highlighted was learning a new form of activism. Ramírez named this form of activism *artivismo tribal*, or tribal artivism—a combination of both art and activism. He explains:

[D]espués es que yo digo, ah, es que es arte-activismo porque le incluyo el tribal, porque aunque yo empiece y estimore, pero esto es una tribu [las mujeres] que forma parte de la pieza . . . Muchas mujeres que intervinieron tanto en la parte, este, intervención, allá en Brasil, como la parte en Puerto Rico, de todas las mujeres que estuvieron trabajando esa dimensión, no, me abrió su intimidad y compartirla conmigo para la transformación de ese cuerpo [del performer] . . . Eh, transitando con un elemento, que en otros países los hombres se ponen falda, pero aquí esa no es la realidad, okay, tenemos otras cosas que decir. After saying, ah, this is art-activism because I include the “tribal” aspect, because although I started and stimulated [the performance], but this is a tribe [the women] that is part of the piece . . . Many women who intervened in both Brazil and Puerto Rico, it is about all the women who were working that dimension, they welcomed me in their private space and shared it with me for the transformation of the [performer’s] body . . . Eh, passing through with an element [the skirt], that in other countries men wear skirts, but here that is not the reality, okay, we have other things to say. (personal communication, September 5, 2013)

Heriberto gives a meaning of community to the word *tribal*. He compares the women who intervened in the performance with their stories to a form of tribe, guiding the skirt to each stop, and as a consequence, transforming the performer who wore it. He finds it important to talk about the skirt and what it means within Puerto Rico, where heteropatriarchal norms dominate the way people relate with each other. Another respondent, Carlos A. Muñiz Osorio, reported that wearing a skirt while walking the streets during the last event of *Ponte En Mi Falda* was an exercise that made him think and talk more about gender issues. This exercise helped him to be more open and sensitive to others and himself: “cómo yo mismo me ‘negoceo’, como miro, qué

pienso, qué cosas me permito,” how I negotiate with myself, how I look, what I think, what things I allow on myself (Muñiz Osorio, personal communication, December 17, 2013). These statements illustrate how *Ponte En Mi Falda* opened a space for participants to question themselves, society, and the male privilege that comes attached to traditional gender roles.

All respondents reported that the street performances in which they participated provoked conversations both at the performance site(s) and around the Island through media coverage. The performers of *Siluetas de Mujer* and *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* were strategic in selecting the sites and times for their street performances. The OPM represented the institution where the denunciations made by both performances were not being addressed. In addition, the OPM was a strategic location to reach out to more public due to it being located on an avenue that is particularly busy in the mornings, which is when both performances were done. The feminist activists expected these two street performances to cause the public to stop, think, and talk to others about the images that they saw. As respondent Johanna Emmanuelli Huertas states:

Sabes que [la gente] van a seguir pensando en lo que vieron durante todo el día. Verdad, es un efecto que se estira, eh, por lo menos para la gente que lo, que lo presencia [el performance]. You know that people are going to keep thinking about it throughout the whole day. Right? It is an effect that stretches itself, at least for people who witnessed [the performance]. (personal communication, April 15, 2013)

In both cases the respondents confirm the achievement of provoking this reaction from the public. María Reinat Pumarejo, one of the respondents, remembers that everything stopped as soon as the *Musas* showed up in the street: “*la gente estaba con nosotros, que entraron en la energía [del performance], que por un momento se detuvo el tiempo,*” the spectators were with us, they entered into the energy [of the performance], for a moment time stopped (personal

communication, September 11, 2013). Liana Carrasquillo Vázquez talks similarly about the reactions she saw: “*que el público lo recibió, que el público lo miró, que se interesó y que se habló sobre el tema,*” that the public received and looked at the performance, they were interested, and discussed the topic (personal communication, April 17, 2013). The participants of *Silueta de Mujer* took the additional step of blocking the street in order to display the banner that warned drivers to drive slowly as they passed over the silhouettes.

Although *Ponte En Mi Falda* was more of an introspective exercise for Heriberto, he also expected the public to question his image when walking through the public streets. He broadened this expectation for the performance’s final event, where other men and women joined him. This final event included conversations about masculinity, traditional gender roles, and gender violence, among other topics relevant to this performance. Carlos A. Muñiz Osorio, one of the respondents who participated in *Ponte En Mi Falda*, says that more than one person stopped to ask what they were doing, and others shouted, commented, gave them weird looks, or laughed, and some passing cars honked as well (personal communication, December 17, 2013). The reactions of the public described by the respondents demonstrate that the feminist activists achieved their main goal and that their message was communicated to those who witnessed the performances.

The media played an important role in taking the conversations about the street performances to a national level. According to the respondents, most of the journalists that covered the street performances were professional and respectful to the activists. Both *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* and *Ponte En Mi Falda* were covered on the front pages of the major newspapers in Puerto Rico. Heriberto took some time away from the public eye in order to process the experiences he obtained from *Ponte En Mi Falda*. However, upon his return, he

learned about debates happening on morning radio shows that discussed his performance due to newspaper coverage. Heriberto accepted an invitation to be interviewed on the show *Piedra, Papel y Tijera* of Radio Universidad at the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras. This particular interview covered the details of *Ponte En Mi Falda* and the reasons for doing the performance. The participants of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* were also invited to do interviews, but they opted not to appear in the media because the purpose of the performance was to appear, be seen by the public, and disappear. Zulnette replied to most journalists who called her by saying:

Si tu quieres hablar sobre las Musas tienes que llamar a nuestra, a nuestra manejadoras de prensa porque el diálogo y el discurso de las Musas estaba en el cuerpo. If you want to talk about the *Musas* you have to call our press handlers because the dialogue and discourse of the *Musas* were on the body. (personal communication, September 7, 2013)

Another respondent, Leila G. Negrón Cintrón, confirms that the performance was enough to communicate their message:

[F]ue noticia, y fue noticia, eh, la denuncia, y fue noticia la situación que estaban viviendo las mujeres de sentirse desprovistas y de sentirse sin apoyo, sin sostén, sobretodo gubernamental, verdad, del estado. Yo creo que esa era la comunicación, esto, para mí más contundente. Y ese, ese debate, ese diálogo, se generó. It was news, the denunciation was news, and also the situation that women were living feeling dispossessed and without support, especially from the government and the state. I think that was the strongest communication for me. It generated this debate, this dialogue. (personal communication, April 19, 2013)

After seeing the news family members and friends called many of the respondents to talk about the performances. Most of these conversations were relevant to the performances, but at least one respondent reported that she had problems with her family, to the point that they did not want to talk to her for months. People who recognized the respondents in public approached them and talked to them about the performances. In the case of *Silueta de Mujer*, the media did not demonstrate an interest beyond the initial coverage required for newspaper and TV news outlets.

Several TV shows attempted to portray the street performances in sensationalist ways. Respondents of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* reported that on the day in which the street performance was done, the now-canceled *SuperXclusivo*—a gossip TV show similar to *TMZ*—dedicated time to criticizing the bodies and breasts of the *Musas*, saying that they were fat, ugly, etc. while playing a video of the performance over and over again. Indeed, two respondents confirmed that this criticism was focused on *Musas* who were either black or with what the host of *SuperXclusivo* considered to be overweight bodies. One of the activists singled out was Zulnette, who made me aware of those critiques but thought about them as something that would create more conversation among people watching the show. She said:

La Comay me cogió en el programa y habló, y habló de mis chichos y habló del cuerpo, ¡Está bien! ¡Habló! ¡La Comay habló de las musas! Bueno o malo, a mí no me importa. Pero se habló de que ocho mujeres se pintaron y se esnuaron y se pararon allí. Y que tenían ocho razones distintas para hacerlo. La Comay [the host of the show] put me on the spot in the show and talked, and talked about my love handles, and talked about my body. That is okay! She spoke about it! La Comay talked about the Musas! Good or bad, I do not care. It was mentioned that eight women painted themselves, and got naked, and

stood there. And that there were eight different reasons for doing so. (personal communication, September 7, 2013)

Other respondents from *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* reported that the comments about the performance in the social media section of online newspapers focused on making fun of the *Musas* and were even violent toward them. Various respondents also described a video that was uploaded to YouTube video that ridiculed the *Musas*, calling them “*payasas*,” or clowns, using the original footage of the performance with circus music in the background. Interestingly, the reaction of the public and the journalists who witnessed the performance in person was respectful and reflective.

Similarly, Heriberto of *Ponte En Mi Falda* accepted an invitation to appear on the also now-canceled late-night TV talk show *Anda Pa'l Cará* wearing the skirt to talk about the performance. *Anda Pa'l Cará* was a comedy show for adults, and Heriberto decided to manage all questions in a professional manner so that the skirt was not ridiculed or taken out of context.

At the international level, the images of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* traveled around Latin America and the Caribbean through the front page of *Red de Salud de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe*, the magazine for the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network. The respondents also shared the news with networks and other feminist movements outside of Puerto Rico. Additionally, family and friends living in the United States contacted many respondents after reading about the street performances in one way or another. In this sense, technology was key to spreading the information outside the Island.

At the educational level, various activists from *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* reported being contacted by professors from the fields of visual arts and sociology requesting permission to use the images and information relevant to the performance in their classes. Some feminist

activists who are also teachers included images of the street performances as part of their discussions in class. In addition, friends of respondents notified the activists that professors at the University of Puerto Rico included the performances as educational material for discussion. Feminists also invited Heriberto to talk about *Ponte En Mi Falda* and the knowledge he acquired from this street performance at academic events on various campuses of the University of Puerto Rico.

Seen from a different educational angle, the MAMPR became more unified after doing *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*. Most of the MAMPR members who originally were hesitant about doing the performance changed their minds after seeing the powerful image that the *Musas* created with their bodies. It is important to re-emphasize that this was the first time that the feminist movement used body painting as a tool for denunciation. Respondent María Reinat confirms:

En términos generales nosotros vimos que la gente reaccionó bien, aún aquellas personas que tú hubieras tenido dudas de como iban a reaccionar, respondieron muy bien. Respondieron muy bien. Esto unió al movimiento también. Sirvió en ese momento para decir ¡mira de lo que somos capaces! Nos unió. Overall, we saw that people reacted well, even those who you doubted how they would react, responded very well. They responded very well. This also united the movement. It served at that time to say, look what we are capable of doing! It united us. (personal communication, September 11, 2013)

Johanna also mentions how this street performance helped to bring an artistic dimension to demonstrations that could mobilize more women for future performances:

Yo creo que de pronto eh, algunas [feministas] no lo habían percibido como posibilidad en absoluto [estar semi-desnudas], o algunas simplemente se les cayó el miedo que tenían, si acaso lo habían percibido como posibilidad en algún momento . . . esa demostración de esas ocho mujeres ha creado que muchas otras mujeres [se atrevan], que ahora si tu llamas a un performance de esos yo estoy segura que van a aparecer. I think that some feminists had not perceived being topless as a possibility at all, or simply lost the fear they had, if at some point they perceived it as a possibility . . . the demonstration of these eight women has inspired many other women to dare, that now, if you call for a performance like this one, I am sure that many will appear. (personal communication, April 15, 2013)

The mobilization of people seems to be a result that happened in all three feminist street performances. In the case of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, there was a second street performance in 2010 titled *Musas de la Conciencia* that highlighted psychological violence, sexual harassment in the workplace, and other forms of violence experienced by elder and transgender women (Figure 17). This time the street performance was done in front of the Employment Security Department of Puerto Rico, and men accompanied the *Musas* in the performance (Figure 18).

In addition to *Musas de la Conciencia*, it was reported that *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* inspired other feminist performances, like *Hombres Barriendo el Machismo*,³⁸ and other non-feminist groups like Sembrando Conciencia. *Hombres Barriendo el Machismo* was done in 2010 in front of the Capitol of Puerto Rico and consisted of around 86 men sweeping up papers with sexist messages while singing against *machismo*. Sembrando Conciencia is a collective of artists and performers that did various body-painting performances for social justice during 2010.



Figure 17. The performers of Musas de la Conciencia. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2010. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2010/11/45907.php>



Figure 18. The performers of Musas de la Conciencia. By Centro de Medios Independientes de Puerto Rico, 2010. Retrieved from <http://pr.indymedia.org/news/2010/11/45907.php>

Various activists and students of the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras repeated *Silueta de Mujer*. Teresa thinks that the fact that this performance was repeated “*es un indicio de la efectividad o de la buena acogida que tuvo el performance,*” is an indication of the effectiveness or the good reception this performance had. In the case of *Ponte En Mi Falda*, Heriberto created a group to continue the conversations about gender and masculinities. This group is called *Macho Cósmico*, or Cosmic Macho, and holds workshops that question gender roles in order to redefine the meaning of masculinity in their lives. Heriberto states:

[Y]o decidí que este camino para mí es y tengo una responsabilidad social de trabajar con mi, eh, con el género que yo represento. Eh, y es un trabajo de empoderamiento, a través de este trabajo de re-significar el masculino, eh, a través de un trabajo de observación interna, un trabajo de observación social, psicológica. Empezar a trabajar consciencia, por eso los talleres no van a parar, los talleres van a crecer. I decided that this is the path I want to follow and I have a social responsibility to work with the gender I represent. This is a work of empowerment, through the re-imagining of what it means to be masculine, is a work of internal observation, a work of social and psychological observation. To start working consciousness, so the workshops are not going to stop, the workshops will grow. (personal communication, September 5, 2013)

Carlos Muñiz Osorio, who has participated in some of the workshops of *Macho Cósmico*, talked about the experience of continuing the conversation about gender and masculinities:

[A]lgo que Heriberto traía, y que otros autores han traído, es que se nos ha negado, no por pasarnos la mano, pero nos hemos negado como varones a vivir cosas como seres humanos. A sensibilizarnos, a abrazarnos, a expresarnos, a jugar ya de adultos, como varones. Este, y eso genera un espacio, este, verdad, bien particular y yo he empezado a

retomarlo. Heriberto and other authors have brought something that we have been denied, not to say that we are feeling sorry for ourselves, but as men we have refused to experience things as human beings. To be sensitive, to embrace, to express ourselves, to play as adults, as men. Learning to do that creates a very particular space and I have started to make it my own. (personal communication, December 17, 2013)

Carlos continued to talk about how masculinity causes pain to so many boys and men who do not allow themselves to do many things, in order to follow patriarchal gender rules. He also acknowledged the privilege from which he benefits as a heterosexual man and how he learned to be more conscious of this through his conversations with Heriberto. These and other experiences reported by the activists demonstrate the educational attainment that resulted from the feminist street performances.

The long-term effects of these street performances can be seen in the related conversations and projects that have continued throughout the years. For example, various respondents mentioned that the fact that this study draws attention to the street performances in which they participated is an indicator of their staying power. When I asked Zulnette about the effects of *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén*, she said, “*¡Hace cuantos años fue esto! ¡Y tu estas hoy aquí hablando del tema!*,” How many years ago was this! And you are here today talking about it!

As a final remark about the significance of feminist street performances, I want to reference the words of visual arts scholar Tyson E. Lewis (2014):

Perhaps what is needed here is the theorization of a “theatrical will” that takes risks to invent new subject positions not anticipated by administrative power, that produces unrecognizable forms of agency, that performs scripts that were not written in advance by

hegemonic institutions, that adopts roles considered inappropriate or profane, and that speaks lines that are out of place and out of turn.

My reading of embodiment and the described forms of impact that each feminist street performance had on both activists and outsiders reveal how Lewis's *theatrical will* intertwines with these performances as alternative imaginaries. Authorities have historically forged selective narratives to promote an ideal(ized) national body that benefits those in power. However, the theatrical will of feminist activists not only makes visible the narratives often ignored by the first level of operation but also builds social movements, giving legitimacy to the impact of everyday people.

Feminist street performances take risks when inventing new subject positions—in the form of topless-painted *Musas*, the skirt, and silhouettes—that bring to light social inequalities. These new subject positions appear in the public space forming unusual and shocking images that, as shown in this section, provoke reactions ranging from gestures of solidarity to verbal attacks. By exposing and having control of their bodies, the performers centralize the agency of the female body as one that is not waiting for the nation to change but instead attends to the issues relevant to the Island's political moment. The scripts they perform take forms of denunciation uncovering the repressive and violent processes of Puerto Rico's sociopolitical context. Activist speak lines disrupting gendered constructions through their bodies, appearing and disappearing from the public street, moving toward new locations, and finding new possibilities in the conversations that emerge from their political manifestations.

From an island feminist perspective, the theatrical will of feminist street performances opens an alternative space to criticize and unsettle colonialism through the articulation of multiple narratives and experiences of the female body. Feminist activists intervene in the

sociopolitical context of Puerto Rico by traversing individual and collective processes in which they re-contextualize the female body by speaking about and through the body, and then rethinking the body in the process of doing street performances. Through this re-contextualization activists develop new understanding of representation, identity, and social positionality, contributing to dismantling gendered heteropatriarchal and colonial demands crafted through the ideal(ized) national body. On balance, the centralization of women's agency, the creation of spaces for dialogues, and the re-contextualization of their bodies make these feminist street performances examples of decolonial actions.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate how feminist anti-violence activism uncovers interconnections between gender and ongoing processes of violence in Puerto Rico. I focused my analysis on how the female body has been constructed and targeted by patriarchal, colonial, and neocolonial systems of power through violent means. In order to present examples of those systems of power and how they are challenged by feminist anti-violence activism, I proposed an island feminist perspective encompassing two levels of operation: the first through examples of the ideal(ized) national body, and the second through examples of alternative imaginaries in the form of feminist street performances. Both levels of operation showed several arguments: First, we cannot fully understand feminism without understanding island-specific realities of women; second, we cannot fully understand gender violence in Puerto Rico without understanding the roles that patriarchy and colonialism have played in targeting the female body—in particular through racist, classist, and heterosexist practices; and third, we cannot fully understand neocolonial violence against women without understanding how contemporary anti-violence activism denounces gender violence and inspires discourses of multiple identities and experiences.

Throughout this study we see how colonial and state authorities represent the first level of operation by enforcing traditional gender roles as part of the colonial/national project that each one envisions. Through this level the female body is defined by narrow standards in order to construct an ideal(ized) national body that grants patriarchal, white, and heterosexual supremacy. Colonial authorities introduced gendered and racialized categories that classified poor female bodies of color as inferior. The prejudices attached to those gendered and racialized categories

are put into practice in the abuses performed by the Spanish domain on Indigenous and African female bodies, and by the U.S. domain through hormonal experiments and control over the sexual reproduction of Puerto Rican female bodies. The neocolonial examples are represented through the attacks on the OPM by politicians seeking to prioritize their political agendas over women's issues. These neocolonial examples intertwined with examples from the past when Pesquera invaded the OPM and Fortuño created policies that inscribe traditional gender roles on the female body. Through the description of these attacks we see how the OPM represented a space of possibilities to advance women's rights for the feminist movements. Yet, the powers that this office gained with *Ley 20* did not protect it from the political interests of Puerto Rican politicians. Reliance on state funding became a limitation for the OPM, especially when state leaders wanted to control and monitor social justice initiatives for the sake of their political agendas.

The second level of operation provides an understanding of feminist street performances as alternative imaginaries, shifting the narrow definitions enforced by the first level of operation. This takes place at the grassroots level, and each feminist street performance adds a different perspective of social identities and gender violence in Puerto Rico. The images painted on the bodies of the performers in *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* depicted political borders, guns, and aggressors' handprints, embodying the identities that dominant narratives choose to ignore. In *Ponte En Mi Falda*, the performer traversed traditional gender roles in Puerto Rico by walking the public streets provoking people to stare and talk about the skirt he wore. Women integrated themselves in *Ponte En Mi Falda* to share their stories and understandings of womanhood through activism. Moreover, the performers of *Silueta de Mujer* refused to ignore the deaths due to gender violence in the middle of political decisions that overlooked those issues. All these

feminist street performances addressed issues that the first level of operation ignored through embodiment and occupation of the public space. In the process of addressing these issues feminist activists denounced and made visible gender violence as a social issue that needs to be addressed at a national level, and highlighted the role of the state as a participant in heteropatriarchal systems that reproduce gender violence. They also inspire discourses of women's sociopolitical and economic conditions through the use of the body in order to face Puerto Rico's political leaders and their "partisan games" over the crisis of the less privileged. Finally, they provided an understanding of how their demonstrations were shaped by a particular historical and sociopolitical moment, and disrupted traditional gender roles to open space for the multiple identities and experiences each performance represented.

By examining the examples of both levels of operation, I have demonstrated that an island feminist perspective is important in order to identify how patriarchy, colonialism, and neocolonialism intersect when replicating abusive practices that target the female body in Puerto Rico. This intersection is evident in discourses that promote traditional gender roles that secure male supremacy and the various ways in which those discourses have controlled women's sexuality and reproductive systems. The neocolonial examples replicate those discourses in addition to the use of neoliberal tactics benefiting systems of power. Resistance is another aspect that an island feminist perspective highlights, because each feminist performance is a particular demonstration, using particular forms of expression and working against and within island-specific politics.

During 2014 and 2015 I was invited to present this study to undergraduate students at various campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. Every time I described the feminist street performances I received commentaries from students saying they felt impacted by the images

and the reasons behind each performance. Many of the students also mentioned that they had never heard about these performances before my presentation. Some of them told me they remembered something about one or two of them but did not pay too much attention. Perhaps at the time these performances were done the students were young and not interested in this sort of news. Hearing these comments was significant to me because I noticed how introducing students to the performances expanded their perspectives about feminism in various ways. For example, they now thought of *feminism* as an inclusive term that is not only pertinent within academic circles but also practiced in various forms at different levels—personal, professional, spiritual, in the community, etc. Students also talked about the historical and sociopolitical context in which the performances were conducted, and compared them to other similar demonstrations they had seen more recently.

This study is an attempt to formally create conversations like the ones students had with me during those presentations. By documenting feminist street performances I aim to provoke further discussions about island feminism inside and outside Puerto Rico. Moreover, this study advances an interdisciplinary conversation between feminist, border, performance, body, Puerto Rican, and island studies. Among the interdisciplinary conversations are: looking to the intersection of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social identities on issues of violence in islands; the inclusion of Puerto Rico's sociopolitical and feminist works in the scholarship on island studies; the navigation of island-specific politics, cultures, and systems of power by feminist activists; the use of the body to denounce gender violence by feminist activists in islands; and complicating national understandings of borders, colonialism, and the violence involved in those processes to advance theoretical, historical, and sociopolitical contexts of Puerto Rican feminist studies. In this sense, this study advances transnational feminist

pedagogies and praxes that can lead to new theories and actions addressing gender inequality and discrimination specific to islands.

This study also allows me to continue conversations with the feminist movements in Puerto Rico. The oral histories conducted for this project, for example, are rich sources of information about contemporary feminist activism and feminist movements in the Island. This information has not been totally addressed in this project; thus, I will continue documenting these activists' oral histories in the future. I intend to find more connections between their lived experiences, the work they do as feminist activists, and their thoughts about the future of gender violence in Puerto Rico. By using the theoretical framework of this study, I also intend to demonstrate how the respondents' lived experiences have been impacted by systems of power, as well as highlight the uniqueness of the work they do to navigate Puerto Rico's politics.

A comparison between feminist activism in Puerto Rico, Latin America, and the Caribbean can open a space for new discussions and future research relevant to the topics explored in this study. I identify certain connections that make this future research possible, such as similar colonial histories, immigration issues, and the use of performances to denounce gender violence. Some questions that arise from this research are: How might the the levels of operation explored in this study apply to other countries of the Caribbean and Latin America? Are there examples of intent to perpetuate an ideal(ized) national body in those places? How do alternative imaginaries operate in those countries in comparison to Puerto Rico?

At the end of one of the presentations I did at the University of Puerto Rico, an employee shared the effect that *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* had on her. She mentioned that she was one of the employees working at the OPM the day that this performance was done. Moreover, she was one of the employees losing her job due to *Ley 7*, and seeing the *Musas* outside of the

OPM felt like an act of solidarity in that moment of crisis in which thousands of people were losing their jobs. Someone was showing up for the women affected by this law, she said. I choose to tell this story as I come to the close of this study because it serves as a reminder of the stories that are not heard when policies and laws are passed behind the doors of the Puerto Rican Capitol. It is my hope that this study made more visible the impact that decisions like those have on women's lives and bodies. I want to finish this project with a poem written by respondent María Reinat Pumarejo:

Desprovistas y sin sostén

Desprovistas y sin sostén quedan las madres y sus retoños ante la estrechez vulgar que exige el sacrificio humano

Desnudas en exigencia

Desprovistas y sin sostén al violentarse su íntimo derecho a la plenitud a través del trabajo honrado

Desnudas denunciando la violación

Desprovistas y sin sostén en el ataque matricida e incestuoso de aquellos llamados a velar por el bien común

Desnudas ante la hipocresía del poder comprometido con el solo poder

Desprovistas y sin sostén ante el ultraje del que toma y manda mancillando las rutas profundas de la dignidad humana

Desnudas develando el secreto

Desprovistas y sin sostén, desnudas, acusando y condenando el tiempo cierto de la vejación.

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Appendix A

Protocolo de Historias Orales

Consentimiento y Explicación:

Esta entrevista será para el proyecto de disertación de Noralis Rodríguez-Coss, candidata a doctorado en Estudios de Género, Mujeres y Sexualidad de la Universidad de Washington. La disertación explora la producción cultural feminista en contra de la violencia hacia las mujeres en Puerto Rico. Específicamente, como los movimientos u organizaciones feministas han utilizado el performance para denunciar la violencia de género.

La disertación esta supervisada por un comité de graduación el cual esta compuesto por profesoras de la Universidad de Washington: Dras. Ángela B. Ginorio, Michelle Habell-Pallan y Shirley Yee del Departamento de Estudios de Género, Mujeres y Sexualidad; Dra. Ileana Rodríguez-Silva del Departamento de Historia; y la Prof. Valerie Curtis-Newton de la Escuela de Drama y representante de Estudios Graduados.

Esta entrevista se preservará por un periodo de 2 a 5 años para propósitos de la disertación. La colección de estas entrevistas constará de relatos de mujeres que han participado en los movimientos feministas, trabajado en organizaciones dirigidas hacia asuntos de las mujeres o participado en los performances que cubre la disertación.

La entrevista será grabada en video o audio. Tanto en el video/audio y la transcripción se le identificará por su nombre personal. Si opta permanecer en anonimato, únicamente yo y las personas asociadas a la disertación tendrán acceso al video/audio y la transcripción de la entrevista. Bajo el anonimato será identificada en la transcripción y en la disertación por un número. Es importante recalcar que la disertación doctoral es un documento público y que estará disponible de forma física y electrónica en las bibliotecas dentro y fuera de los Estados Unidos.

La entrevista tendrá una duración aproximada de dos horas y usted puede retirarse del proyecto sin perjuicio antes de la ejecución y entrega de la misma. En el caso que decida retirarse de la entrevista, la cinta será destruida, y no se hará transcripción ninguna. Estas preguntas han sido diseñadas bajo la suposición de que usted se identifica como feminista. De no ser así, usted puede clarificarlo al principio de la entrevista.

Preguntas

Personales:

Consiente esta entrevista?

Por favor, nos puede decir su nombre y describir quién es (ejemplo: nombre, profesión, etc.).

Nos puede hablar un poco sobre cuando y donde nació, ¿como eso se relaciona con su trabajo?

¿Tuvo alguna vez alguna indicación que la identificara como feminista durante su niñez y/o juventud?

¿Cuándo fue la primera vez que se intereso en las causas feministas? ¿Por qué decidió continuar trabajando?

¿Cómo define el concepto feminismo(s)?

¿Cuál ha sido la mejor experiencia de trabajar en grupos/organizaciones feministas?

¿Qué ha sido el reto mas difícil de trabajar en grupos/organizaciones feministas?

Musas Desprovistas:

¿Qué situaciones sociales o políticas influyeron su participación en Musas Desprovistas?

¿Cómo fue el proceso de planificación/creación de Musas Desprovistas?

¿Cómo integraron raza/género/clase en conversación con el performance?

¿Cómo fue la selección/planificación de las imágenes pintadas en el cuerpo de las mujeres?

¿Por qué performance como método?

¿Cómo se diferencia el performance a otras formas de protesta o activismo?

¿Qué clase de ideas o sentimientos se querían comunicar a través de Musas Desprovistas?

¿A qué se debió que el Performance durara 15 minutos?

Describe el proceso de preparación esa mañana del 2 de noviembre de 2009.

Describe el proceso cuando salieron a la calle.

¿Cuál fue la reacción del publico que estaba allí presente?

Como performer/reportera/etc. ¿cómo se sintió durante y luego del performance?

¿Cómo sintió que los medios manejaron el performance?

Según su opinión, ¿cuáles fueron las consecuencias del Performance? ¿Causó impacto?

Basada en esta experiencia y los proyectos/organizaciones en las que trabaja, ¿cómo se imagina dentro de 20 años la situación de violencia en contra de las mujeres en el País?

¿Hay algo más que le gustaría decir que no hemos cubierto en la entrevista?

Appendix B

Oral Histories Protocol (English)

Consent and Explanation:

This interview will be for the dissertation project of Noralis Rodríguez-Coss, Ph.D. Candidate in Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington. Her dissertation explores feminist cultural production of violence against women in Puerto Rico. Specifically, the use of performances by feminist movements and organizations to denounce violence.

The dissertation is supervised by a graduate committee of professors from the University of Washington: Drs. Ángela B. Ginorio, Michelle Habell-Pallán, and Shirley Yee from the Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies; Dr. Ileana Rodríguez-Silva from the Department of History; and Prof. Valerie Curtis-Newton from the School of Drama and Graduate School Representative.

This oral history will be preserved for a period of 2-5 years. The questions of this oral history are about stories of women who have been involved in the feminist movement, worked in organizations led to women's issues or participated in performances covered in the dissertation.

The interview will be recorded on audio. You will be identified by your name in the audio and transcript. If you choose to remain anonymous, only the people associated with my dissertation and I will have access to audio and transcript of the interview. Under confidentiality a number will identify you in the transcript and dissertation. Importantly, the dissertation is a public document and will be available for physical and electronic libraries within and outside the United States.

The interview will last approximately two hours and you can withdraw from the project without prejudice before its execution and delivery. If you decide to withdraw from the interview, the tape will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the oral history. These questions are designed under the assumption that you identify yourself as a feminist. Otherwise, you can clarify that at the beginning of the interview.

Questions

Personal:

Do you consent this interview?

Please can you tell us your name and introduce yourself (ex. name, profession, etc...).

Can you talk a little about when and where you were born and how this connects to your work?

Have you ever had any indication during childhood and / or adolescence that identified you as a feminist?

When was the first time you became interested in feminist causes? Why did you decide to continue working?

How do you define feminism(s)?

What has been the best experience of working in feminist groups/organizations?

What has been the most difficult challenge of working in feminist groups/organizations?

Musas Desprovistas/Ponte En Mi Falda/Silueta de Mujer:

What social or political situations influenced your participation in Musas Desprovistas?

How was the process of planning/creating Musas Desprovistas?

How did you all integrated race/gender/class in conversation with the performance?

How was the selection/planning of the images painted on women's bodies?

Why performance as a method?

How is performance different to other forms of protest or activism?

What kind of ideas or feelings the Performeras wanted to communicate through Musas Desprovistas?

Why did the Performance last 15 minutes?

Describe the process of preparation the morning of November 2, 2009.

Describe the process when you walked to the street.

What was the reaction of the audience that was present?

As a performer/journalist/etc., how did you feel during and after the performance?

How you feel about the way that the media managed the performance?

In your opinion, what were the consequences of this performance? Did it cause an impact?

Based on this experience and projects/organizations in which you work, how do you imagine in 20 years the situation of violence against women in the country?

Is there anything else you would like to say that we have not covered in the interview?

Appendix C

**UNIVERSIDAD DE WASHINGTON
HOJA DE CONSENTIMIENTO
HISTORIAS ORALES
DISERTACIÓN DE NORALIS RODRÍGUEZ COSS**

Investigadora: Noralis Rodríguez, candidata de doctorado en Estudios Feministas del Departamento de Estudios de Género, Mujeres y Sexualidad, (787) 718-1276, mentoras: Dras. Ángela B. Ginorio, Michelle Habell-Pallán, y Shirley Yee del Departamento de Estudios de Género, Mujeres y Sexualidad; Dra. Ileana Rodríguez-Silva del Departamento de Historia; y la Profa. Valerie Curtis-Newton de la Escuela de Drama y Representante de Estudios Graduados.

Declaración de la Investigadora:

Mi nombre es Noralis Rodríguez y soy candidata de doctorado en Estudios Feministas de la Universidad de Washington. Estoy llevando a cabo historias orales a activistas y académicas(os) que participaron en cualquiera de tres performances particulares que tuvieron lugar en Puerto Rico en 2009: Musas Desprovistas el 2 de noviembre; Ponte En Mi Falda el 2 de agosto; y Silueta de mujer el 28 de diciembre.

El propósito de esta hoja de consentimiento es para pedirle que participe de esta investigación. La misma ofrece la información que necesita para ayudarle a decidir si desea participar. Lea el formulario cuidadosamente. Usted puede hacer preguntas sobre el propósito de la investigación, su participación en la misma, los posibles riesgos y beneficios, sus derechos como voluntaria(o), y cualquier otra pregunta sobre la investigación o alguna información que no esté clara en este documento. Cuando haya respondido a todas sus preguntas, usted puede decidir si desea participar en el estudio. Este proceso se llama "consentimiento informado." Se le dará una copia de este formulario para sus registros.

PROPÓSITO DEL ESTUDIO

Me interesa investigar la producción feminista de performances que denuncian la violencia contra las mujeres y/o violencia de género en Puerto Rico, específicamente: Musas Desprovistas, Ponte En Mi Falda y Silueta de mujer. Mientras estoy analizando el contexto histórico y socio-político de esos performances, también exploro la manera en que los procesos de violencia colonial están conectados a esta investigación. El propósito de las historias orales es incluir su testimonio e historia como evidencia para ayudar a documentar los performances. Todas las personas que voy a entrevistar para las historias orales participaron en uno o más de los performances antes mencionados. Alrededor de 20 historias orales serán recogidas y audio grabadas.

PROCEDIMIENTO DEL ESTUDIO

Le voy a enviar la guía de entrevista y la hoja de consentimiento antes de hacer la historia oral. De esta manera usted podrá leer las preguntas, ponerse en contacto conmigo en caso de tener

preguntas y decidir si desea participar en las historias orales. Una vez que haya aceptado participar en las historias orales podemos programar una fecha para reunirnos. El día en que llevemos a cabo la historia oral traeré una copia impresa de la guía de entrevista y esta hoja de consentimiento. Antes de que comience la grabación de audio, responderé cualquier pregunta relacionada con mi investigación y las historias orales. Usted puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta antes o durante la historia oral. Las historias orales serán en forma de una conversación y tendrá una duración aproximada de dos horas.

Usted también puede optar por permanecer bajo confidencialidad. Esto significa que un número la(o) identificará en la transcripción y la disertación (ver más bajo confidencialidad). Después de empezar la grabación de audio usted puede retirarse del proyecto sin perjuicio, antes de su ejecución y entrega. Si decide retirarse de la entrevista, el archivo o cinta de la entrevista será destruida y no se llevará a cabo ninguna transcripción.

Le enviaré una copia de la transcripción (que podrá modificar a su gusto) al finalizar el proceso de escritura y una copia de la tesis cuando haya terminado.

RIESGOS, ESTRÉS O INCOMODIDAD

Dado que las preguntas se centran en los performances que ya forman parte de registros públicos, es muy poco probable que sus respuestas la(o) pongan en riesgo alguno. Si alguna pregunta le causa incomodidad, usted es libre de omitir o retirar la pregunta. Sin embargo, con el fin de proteger su privacidad o consecuencias futuras fuera de la investigación razonable, usted puede optar por sustituir su identidad con un número (ver más bajo confidencialidad).

BENEFICIOS DEL ESTUDIO

Usted no recibirá ningún beneficio directo en la participación de este estudio, pero la historia oral me dará la oportunidad de incluir su voz en mi tesis y aprender cosas de su experiencia que podría revelar detalles importantes para documentar los performances.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Después de grabar las historias orales, el archivo o cinta y su contenido pertenecen a la investigación recopilada para mi disertación. Únicamente el comité de disertación y yo tendremos acceso a las grabaciones y las transcripciones de la entrevista. Estas se archivarán por un periodo de 2 a 5 años. Las grabaciones y transcripciones se mantendrán protegidas bajo llave y/o contraseña electrónica.

Para efectos de la disertación usted será identificada(o) por su nombre personal en la grabación (literal y editada). Si decide permanecer bajo confidencialidad, sólo mi comité de graduación y yo tendremos acceso al audio y la transcripción de la historia oral. Un número lo identificará tanto en la transcripción como en la disertación bajo confidencialidad.

Después de un término de cinco años, podría comunicarme con usted para firmar una nueva hoja de consentimiento si otras condiciones surgen como resultado de la publicación de la disertación, tales como: (i) presentaciones en conferencias y congresos, (ii) materiales disponibles para la enseñanza dentro y fuera de Puerto Rico, (iii) y utilizar el material disponible para un futuro proyecto de archivo digital feminista, entre otros.

Personal del gobierno o de la universidad a veces revisan los estudios como éste para asegurarse de que se están haciendo de manera segura y legal. Si una revisión de este estudio se lleva a cabo, sus expedientes podrán ser examinados. De ser revisada, el personal protegerá su privacidad. Los registros del estudio no serán utilizados para ponerla(o) en riesgo legal.

INFORMACIÓN ADICIONAL

Es importante destacar que la disertación es un documento público y estará disponible en las bibliotecas físicas y electrónicas dentro y fuera de los Estados Unidos. Usted puede negarse a participar y es libre de retirarse de este estudio en cualquier momento sin penalización. Su contribución a las historias orales servirá para documentar los performances antes mencionados.

Noralis Rodríguez-Coss

Nombre completo de la investigadora	Firma	Fecha
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Declaración de la persona entrevistada:

Se me explicó el propósito de este estudio. Me ofrezco como voluntaria(o) para participar en esta investigación. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas. Si tuviera más preguntas sobre la investigación, puedo preguntar a la investigadora. Si tengo preguntas sobre mis derechos como sujeto de investigación, puedo llamar a la División de Sujetos Humanos (Human Subjects Division) al (206) 543-0098. Recibiré una copia de esta hoja de consentimiento.

Nombre completo de la persona entrevistada	Firma	Fecha
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Copias para: Investigadora
Sujeto

Appendix D

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
 CONSENT FORM
 ORAL HISTORIES
 DISSERTATION OF NORALIS RODRÍGUEZ-COSS**

Researcher: Noralis Rodríguez, PhD Candidate Feminist Studies, Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies, (787) 718-1276, faculty advisors: Drs. Angela B. Ginorio, Michelle Habell-Pallán, and Shirley Yee from the Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies; Dr. Ileana Rodríguez-Silva from the Department of History; and Prof. Valerie Curtis-Newton from the School of Drama and Graduate School Representative.

Researchers' statement

My name is Noralis Rodríguez and I am a doctoral candidate in Feminist Studies at the University of Washington. I am conducting oral histories to activists and scholars that have participated in any of three particular performances that took place in Puerto Rico: Musas Desprovistas (Deprived Muses) done in November 2, 2009; Ponte En Mi Falda (Try on my skirt) done in August 2, 2009; and Silueta de mujer (Silhouette of a woman) done on December 28, 2009.

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am interested to investigate the feminist production of street performances that denounce violence against women and/or gender violence in Puerto Rico such as: Musas Desprovistas (Deprived Muses), Ponte En Mi Falda (Try on my skirt), and Silueta de mujer (Silhouette of a woman). While I am analyzing the historical and sociopolitical context of those street performances, I also explore the way colonial processes of violence are connected to this research. The purpose of the oral histories is to include your voice and story as evidence to help document the performances. All individuals that I will interview for the oral histories participated in one or more of the performances stated above. Around 20 oral histories will be collected and audio recorded.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Prior to do the oral histories I will send you the interview guide and consent form. This way you can: read the questions I am interested to ask, contact me in case you have questions, and decide if you would like to participate in the oral histories. Once you have agreed to participate in the oral histories we can schedule a date to meet. The day of the oral history I will bring a hard copy of the interview guide and this consent form. I will be able to answer any question related to my research and oral histories before I start audio recording the oral history. You can refuse to answer any question before or during the oral history. The oral histories will be in form of a conversation and will last approximately two hours.

You can also choose to remain under confidentiality. This means that only a number will identify you in the transcript and dissertation (see more under Confidentiality). After I start audio recording the oral histories you can withdraw from the project without prejudice, before its execution and delivery. If you decide to withdraw from the interview, the tape/file will be destroyed and no transcript will be done out of that interview.

I will send you a copy of the transcript (which you will be able to amend) by the end of my writing process and a copy of the dissertation when finished.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Because questions are focused on performances that are already part of the public record, it is highly unlikely that your answers will place you at risk of any nature. If any question causes you discomfort, you are free to omit or withdraw the question. However, in order to protect your privacy or future consequences outside the research reasonably, you can choose to replace your identity with a number (see more under Confidentiality).

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You will not receive any direct benefit from participating in the study, but the oral history will give me the opportunity to include your voice in my dissertation and I will learn things from your experiences that could reveal important details to document the performances.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

After the oral histories are audio recorded, the tape/file and the content belongs to the research collected for the dissertation. For a period of 2 to 5 years, only the dissertation committee and I will have access to audio and the transcripts of the interview. Both the audio tape/file and the transcripts will be kept protected under lock and/or electronic password.

For purposes of the dissertation you will be identified in the audio (literal and edited) and dissertation by my personal name. If you choose to remain under confidentiality, only my graduate committee and I will have access to the audio and the transcript of the oral history. Under confidentiality, a number will identify you in both the transcript and the dissertation.

After the term of five years, I might contact you to sign a new consent form if other conditions arise as a result of the publication of the dissertation, such as: (i) presentations at conferences and congresses, (ii) material available for teaching in and out of Puerto Rico, (iii) and material available for future feminist digital archive project, among others.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

OTHER INFORMATION

It is important to emphasize that the dissertation is a public document and will be available for physical and electronic libraries within and outside the United States. You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Your contribution to the oral histories will serve to document the performances.

Noralis Rodríguez-Coss

Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date

Copies to: Researcher
 Subject

VITA

Noralis moved from Puerto Rico to the United States in 2007 to continue her graduate studies after identifying academia as one of the places where she could create new initiatives to help eradicate violence against women. Noralis obtained a M.A. in Women's Studies from Southern Connecticut State University. Her master's thesis is titled "Challenges of the Third Wave: Mobilizing Young Women to the Feminist Movements in Puerto Rico." She participated as an organizing member of the Women of Color Collective at the University of Washington. She was selected as the recipient of the competitive GO-MAP 2014-15 Stroum Endowed Minority Fellowship at the University of Washington, the 2014 National Women's Studies Association Graduate Scholarship, the 2014 Doman Award for Excellence in Teaching, and a student of the Graduate Opportunity and Minority Achievement Program. In 2016, Noralis accepted a post-doctoral teaching position in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA.

Footnotes

¹ The media outlets included *El Vocero*, *Cybernews*, *El Expresso*, and *El Metro* newspapers, and the wapa.tv news channel, all dated January 26, 2015.

² In a podcast interview, lawyer and social justice activist Osvaldo Burgos explained that in comparison to other countries the OPM and other *Procuradurías* in Puerto Rico function similar to the Office of the Ombudsman, which in other countries handles human rights issues. In Puerto Rico the Office of the Ombudsman is more directed to taking care of complains relevant to governmental services, such as unusually high utility bills (Contrapunto, 2013).

³ This interview was done for *Foro Noticioso* on January 26, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.foronoticioso.com/fn/procuradora-de-la-mujer-se-manifiesta-sobre-mas-reciente-caso-de-violencia-de-genero>.

⁴ This is my own translation of the title of the performance. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Spanish to English, including direct quotes of oral histories, are my own.

⁵ I also employ Margaret Schuler's (1992) definition of *state violence*, which is, in addition to war, the "deprivation of resources for physical and psychological well being (health/nutrition, education, means of livelihood); enactment of discriminatory laws and policies or through the discriminatory application of the law"; and the legitimization of patriarchal and colonial systems of power (p. 12). The state is the locus and/or perpetrator of different forms of gender violence, including *political and custodial violence* (p. 14). According to Schuler (1992), the state is a direct agent of *political violence*, which allows the creation of policies, laws, and other authoritarian procedures designed for illegitimate detentions, forced sterilizations, experimentation on women with unsafe drugs, tolerating gender violence by non-state agents (e.g., economic enterprises), etc. (pp. 14–15). *Custodial violence*, on the other hand, is

manifested through military, police, or other authoritarian institutions that utilize rape, torture, etc. (p. 14). This study focuses on political forms of state violence. *Violencia machista*, or machista violence in English, is also used as a synonym of gender violence. *Violencia machista* is often used in Puerto Rico by feminist organizations and individuals to emphasize that the motive of violence is based on *machismo*, the assumption that men are socially entitled to dominate. *Gender violence* is also a term that includes different manifestations, loci, and agents of violence such as the family, the social “community,” and the state (Schuler, 1992, p. 14). Family violence includes physical aggression and sexual and emotional abuses, while violence in the social spectrum (workplace, media, etc.) includes physical abuse, sexual assault, commercialized violence (human trafficking, forced prostitution), and pornography (Schuler, 1992, p. 14).

⁶ I refer to Puerto Rico when I write “Island” with a capital I.

⁷ Heteropatriarchy is a patriarchal sociocultural system that privileges male and heterosexual identities as the norm. Any individual without one or both of those identities is hierarchically categorized as inferior. As a sociocultural system, heteropatriarchy intersects with other systems of power, such as racism and classism.

⁸ More information about gender stereotypes and parenting can be found in Villamil, B. (1996). *La construcción del rol de la mujer en Puerto Rico: Tres perspectivas generacionales*. *Homines*, 20(1), 337–348; and Azize, Y. (1987). *La Mujer en Puerto Rico: Ensayos de investigación* (Colección Huracán academia). Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán.

⁹ I refer to colonialism as a political category that includes a combination of ideologies and actions that have been introduced, imposed, and sustained by external centers of power—Spain and the United States—in collaboration with internal systems of power—authorities and

oppressive social systems, such as patriarchy, racism, and classism. Echoing Caribbean and transnational feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander (2005), the combination of ideologies and actions included in this political category has resulted in a variety of complex meanings and dynamics. The first is a set of social relations, which involves “annexation of land and the subordination of resources to European [and American] interests” (p. 181–182). The invasions by both Spain and the United States, and the current political and economic authority of the U.S. Congress over the Island, have resulted in social relations that enable the abuses against women discussed in this study. These include sexual abuses, forced labor, contraceptive trials and mass sterilizations, and the implementation of laws and reforms that strategically target women’s reproductive systems and sexuality. Second is a set of “ideological practices that draw their epistemic fodder from these forms” (p. 182). I approach this meaning of colonialism through the ways in which colonizers have used their religious and patriarchal systems of thought to justify their abuses against women. This meaning is also relevant to the ways colonial systems of thought define borders of islands in order to minimize and isolate them from centers of power. Sometimes I refer to these systems of thought as *colonial logics*. Finally, colonialism is a metaphor “both in its capacity to travel and in its capacity to stay put” (p. 182). For instance, in this study I explore contemporary examples of moments when the Island defended and/or mimicked a U.S. image: a riot at the OPM because it did not have the U.S. flag hoisted, or the governmental anti-violence campaigns that were created through similar principles of a U.S. conservative organization model.

¹⁰ By neocolonial, I mean contemporary centers of power invested in defending and privileging the nation of the United States over the safety and dignity of individuals in Puerto Rico. This term includes a sphere of activities that replicate colonial methods from the past to

exercise power; for example, laws and reforms are often established to preserve a national image that pleases centers of political and economic power.

¹¹ The descriptions of the street performances included in this study are based on the oral histories that I gathered from activists who participated in the performances.

¹² When I use the term *Musas*, I am referring to the activists performing as muses.

¹³ María Dolores Fernós (2007) expands on this form of organizations that are part of the national mechanisms addressing women's issues that emerged in the Americas as a result of both direct pressures from the feminist movements in their respective countries and women's international conferences sponsored by the United Nations. The first of these conferences was held in México in 1975 (p. 140).

¹⁴ The word "commonwealth" was chosen by Puerto Rican politicians to describe the autonomous government in the Island during the 20th century. They were influenced by the emerging models of the British Commonwealth that granted self-governance to its former colonies (Lewis, 1963). When U.S. President Truman signed the Commonwealth Bill (Public Law 81-600) in 1950, the United States granted self-governance to Puerto Ricans without changing its political status as a territory. As of June 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Rico has no self-authority, nor a real self-governance beyond what the U.S. Congress allows (*Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle*, and *Puerto Rico v. Franklin California Tax-Free Trust*).

¹⁵ Currently, there are two sectors that advocate for different political status beliefs within the PPD: *soberanistas* and *autonomistas*. The *soberanista* sector pursues a political status that would grant Puerto Rico internal and external control over the Island. The *autonomista* sector claims that the current political status can continue growing and functioning within the U.S. federal system.

¹⁶ Some of the information in this section is informed by conversations I have had with leaders of various feminist organizations in the Island.

¹⁷ This isolation in practice is different from the discursive isolation that has been used repeatedly by colonizers to define islands. See Chapter One for more information.

¹⁸ Feminist sociologist Marina Karides (in press) claims to be the first scholar to address gender and island theories using the term *island feminism*. She highlights the work of island studies scholars Barney (2007) and Lattas (2014) as two of the few scholars who have studied the intersections of island, gender, and sexuality. In May 2016, a panel on island feminism, consisting of Marina Karides, Alexandra Bakalaki, Venetia Kantsa, and myself, was the first one to be presented in the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA) Conference in Lesvos Island.

¹⁹ For purposes of this study, decolonization is the act of undoing the multiple forms that colonialism takes as a political category. I put more emphasis on this term in the way feminist activists disrupt colonial constructions of gender and gendered bodies through street performances. I make direct connections between this term and the concept of alternative imaginaries.

²⁰ In *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples* (2013), historians Jalil Sued Badillo and L. Antonio Curet argue that the designation Taino—the name to categorize native populations of the Caribbean, particularly from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic—was used by colonizers and is now a modern label applied to these indigenous ethnic groups. Therefore, historians do not know with certainty the name or names once used by indigenous populations of Puerto Rico. In order to avoid the imposition of labeling indigenous groups with a

term that might not have been used in the past, I opted to use the words *Indian* and *Indigenous* when talking about the indigenous groups from Puerto Rico.

²¹ In addition to Reddock, other scholars who began the study of African female slaves in the Caribbean are Arlette Gautier, Mathurin Mair, Verena Martínez, Karen Fog, and Barbara Bush.

²² I use the term *libertas* to describe former female slaves from Puerto Rico.

²³ Among the Puerto Rican writers mentioned are René Marqués and Pedro Juan Sotelo.

²⁴ By neoliberal, I refer to the use of political power to eliminate social services in order to prioritize partisan interests. In addition to economic policies, I also employ this term when regimes reproduce narratives that focus on individuals rather than systems of inequality to avoid responsibilities pertinent to the prevention of violence.

²⁵ This statement was published in several newspapers of the Island, including *Primera Hora* (November 27, 2007) and *El Nuevo Día* (November 28, 2007).

²⁶ Fortuño's government hired this corporation to perform research to determine whether most Puerto Ricans share the same fundamental values.

²⁷ The term *benevolent sexism* is part of the theoretical framework of ambivalent sexism first developed by social psychologists Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske in their article "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism" (1996) for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

²⁸ The report states that there were three cases still under investigation. In addition, feminist movements have previously claimed that this statistic might not reflect murders of undocumented, transgender, and homeless women. This lack of visibility is what precisely *Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén* are highlighting in their street performance.

²⁹ The Hermit is well known as the IX card of the Tarot, although other interpretations can be found in several philosophical and religious traditions. The image of the Hermit in Tarot cards comes closest to the idea that Ramírez included in *Ponte En Mi Falda*, because the skirt, staff, and lit lantern are typical accessories of the one seen in the cards. The Hermit Tarot card symbolically alludes to the “search for truth,” for example.

³⁰ According to Heriberto García, the performer of *Ponte En Mi Falda*, this website is unavailable because the account was hacked and it is unknown if it will be available again. An alternative way to see it is through the following website:

<http://mydesignsandmore.com/ponteenmifalda/>

³¹ I refer to masculinities in plural to recognize the various social meanings of what constitutes to be a man and the different ways in which people socially express gender.

³² I explain this term in the introduction of the dissertation, but it is similar to the concept of gender violence.

³³ These numbers are the ones reported by the police and included in the 2009 OPM annual report. However, the performers estimated that around 23 women, including transgender women, had been murdered in cases of gender violence so far that year.

³⁴ The names of the artists are Merari Montalvo, Amárilis Pagan Jiménez, Carmen Santiago Buitrago, Awilda Sterling, and María Ordoñez.

³⁵ There is no English translation for *comadre*. In the context of García’s quote, *comadre* refers to being on familiar terms with the other person. I had a conversation in social media with friends about the meaning of the word and the following are two explanations of the term. My friend Elizabeth Ramirez Arreola states that she has seen the term as “*comadrazgo/compadrazgo* relationship,” used by scholars in Anthropology and Sociology working with migration studies

and Latin American paradigms. On the other hand, my friend Julio A. Sánchez explains that in Puerto Rico, this word has been historically associated to a Catholic doctrine of God-parenthood, in which one person fulfills the role of a parent if the biological parents are to die. For example, originally one agreed to raise and keep the child in church doctrine ensuring that, even if the parents die, the child would continue practicing Catholicism. Thus, in Puerto Rico this term speaks to that sense of kinship developed between people that are not necessarily related by blood, but that choose to trust each other with the life and well being of this child. In the case of the respondent's statement, *comadre* is not related to religion, but to familiarity and solidarity with other women.

³⁶ Marielys Burgos made this statement in a panel presentation titled “Juntillas de Activismo Performático: Otro Tipo de Activismo Feminista,” November 15, 2014.

³⁷ I use the word *feminicide* as defined in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*. Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, one of the contributors to this book, defines feminicidal violence as “the culmination of many forms of gender violence against women that represent an attack on their human rights and that lead them to various forms of violent death. In many cases, these forms of gender violence are tolerated by society and the state; at other times citizens live feminicidal violence with powerlessness, for there are few channels available for the enforcement of rights” (p. xxi). One of the performers whom I interviewed for the oral histories also used this term.

³⁸ A similar performance was done in México in 2013. It is unknown if there was a connection between this performance and the one done in Puerto Rico.