COLONIAL DEBTS

ROCÍO ZAMBRANA

THE CASE OF PUERTO RICO

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BRUNO BOSTEELS AND GEORGE CICCARIELLO-MAHER

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For Gabriela

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I began to write this book in 2016 after a detour: from Foucault, power, and US colonial rule in Puerto Rico, a project I began around 2000 at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez, to Hegel, Marx, and critical theory as I unwittingly became a diasporic subject in New York, then Oregon, and now Atlanta. Writing this book was a return when actual prospects of return narrowed by the day. The first writing on Puerto Rico since the 2000 BA thesis was done around 2012. I began to write the book itself in fall 2016, while on sabbatical at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. That summer, Supreme Court cases had announced the death of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) and the US Congress passed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) instituting a Fiscal Control Board that arguably returned Puerto Rico to a form of pre-ELA colonialism. I finished a first draft in 2017, just as Hurricane María marked us all in deep and deeply different ways. Revisions to the second draft of the

book were completed in the aftermath of #RickyRenuncia. In writing about events unfolding, I attempted to document and understand, centering the voices of those acting and writing in Puerto Rico. In that process, I have been gifted somewhat of a return. The love of my family has been essential in this process. They welcome me time and again as I go back and forth from Puerto Rico and the United States. Nadya Marie García, my mother, models love—unyielding, complex, forever present. My sister, Elimari Zambrana, extends memory and laughter. Giancarlo Burgos, my nephew, is full of kindness. Gabriela Mercado, my niece, has been my friend, my daughter, my sister. I am sustained by her love. This book is for her.

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INTRODUCTION COLONIAL DEBTS

"coats are not exchanged for coats"

let us take two commodities such as
50 years of work and one debt
accumulated over 50 years.

as proprietor of the first
you decide to take it to caribe hilton banking
where *i offer my life to pay this debt*.

but they explain that *it's not enough*

> just as the debt and the fifty years of work have use-values that are *qualitatively different*, so are the two forms of labor that produce them: that of the investor and that of the colonized. your life is not enough. you will have to pay with the labor of your children and your children's children.

let's say you tell them *i never had any because*
i never wanted to make heirs of those who
barely know the difference
between milk and coquito.

but they explain that even if you don't have a lineage
your neighbors, the dog that plunders your trash,
doña sophia with her luminous rosary,
your abuela that barely leaves the house to go to the pharmacy,
angelía that still awaits your book,
luis that finally has a job but still has debts to pay,
that guy who mugged you for ten bucks
will inherit.

imagine
that you come back with your neighbors,
with your abuela, with the dog
that sometimes searches your trash,
with angelía, with luis, and say
here are my heirs.
do you accept our payment?
will you terminate our debt?
will you erase our names from the system?

but they say
where are the rivers?
el río guajataca, el río camuy,
el río cibuco, el río bayamón,
el río puerto nuevo, el río grande de loíza,
el río herrera, el río mameyes,
el río sabana, el río fajardo,
el río daguao, el río santiago,
el río blanco, el río humacao,
el río seco, el río maunabo,
etc. etc. etc.

they will be your heirs.
—RAQUEL SALAS RIVERA, *lo terciario / the tertiary*

IN JULY 2019, two weeks of protest ousted Governor Ricardo "Ricky" Rosselló. On July 12, the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (Center for Investigative Reporting) released 889 pages of a Telegram thread in which Rosselló interacted with his closest advisors.[1] The publication of the messages came days after the FBI arrested top government officials, including the Secretary of Education charged with mishandling $15.5 million during a two-year tenure in which 438 schools were closed. Not all eleven men Rosselló affectionately called "brothers" on the Telegram chat were government officials. The brothers discussed public policy and corporate interests as well as public perception in the media and social media. They traded misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, classist "jokes," expletives, and memes. They discussed suppressing information regarding hurricane relief and recovery. They made light of the deaths of Hurricane María. The chat revealed overall apathy for ordinary Puerto Ricans navigating economic downturn and steep austerity measures for over a decade.

For two weeks, people took to the streets. Overcoming political divisions, indignation was expressed with astounding diversity and celebrated creativity: marches, motorized caravans, *cacerolazos* (on the street and in the home), combative dance (from *perreo* to salsa), renamed streets (physically and on Google Maps).[2] These, among other forms of protest, were met with the unconstitutional clearing of the streets of Old San Juan at 11 p.m., with tear gas, with a police force reinforced by the Fuerza de Choque (Tactical Operations Unit) and correctional officers.[3] Rosselló resigned late evening July 24. Indignation, indeed rage, *rabia*, interrupted an impunity evident in the chat. *La generación que no se deja* (the generation that won't take it) made clear that *la era de conformarnos con el menos malo* (the era of settling for the lesser evil) was over. Protestors subverted the brothers' misogynist, homophobic, racist, and classist tropes and expletives: *los criminales usan corbata* (criminals wear ties), *siempre putxs/patxs, nunca pillx* (always a "whore"/queer, never a robber).[4] The success of #RickyRenuncia transitioned to already developing *asambleas de pueblo* (town assemblies). The asambleas might be seen as a form of prefigurative politics, modeling political participation yet to come.[5] As Yarimar Bonilla put it in field notes shared on Facebook, "Assemblies are not imagined as [an] event but as communities: they have Facebook pages and demands. They are emerging as new political constituencies."[6] The assemblies as well as the protests can be seen as building on the "silent coup" (*toma silenciosa de poder*), as

I.1 & I.2 San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 2019. Photo from Luis Othoniel Rosa's Facebook page.

I.3 & I.4
San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 2019. Photo from Luis Othoniel Rosa's Facebook page.

I.5

I.6 Caguas, Puerto Rico. Asamblea de Pueblo (town assembly), August 3, 2019. Photo by Rocío Zambrana.

Bonilla puts it elsewhere, that varieties of *autogestión*, "autonomous organizing" or "mutual aid," have performed in the wake of María.[7]

On September 20, 2017, Category 4 Hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico.[8] Debilitated by Hurricane Irma two weeks prior, Puerto Rico's infrastructure collapsed. The electrical grid, water distribution and filtration systems, and the telecommunications network were severely compromised. Throughout the months that followed, the humanitarian crisis unfolding given the effects of a decade of austerity measures intensified. To different degrees, Puerto Ricans faced difficult mobility or outright isolation due to debris, collapsed bridges and roads, and flooding. They faced limited communication in addition to water, gas, and food shortages. People sought water in superfund sites.[9] Calls made to 911 reporting domestic violence tripled.[10] Members of the trans community faced discrimination at refuge centers and lost access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for months.[11] Eleven months after María, it was reported that the last family without electricity regained service.[12] Many homes never received tarps from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), compounding damages from subsequent rains and flooding. Many FEMA and insurance claims remain outstanding, given misinformation, language barriers, and lack of property titles required by federal law, despite the fact that there is no requirement to hold a title and register property in Puerto Rico.[13]

Federal and local government response was plagued by mismanagement, inefficiency, and corruption. The Jones Act, which regulates maritime commerce, was suspended for only ten days, hindering relief efforts considerably.[14] Throughout 2018, shipping containers, *vagones*, filled with expired provisions were found in abandoned lots, thousands of water bottles were left to rot on an airport tarmac, dead bodies were revealed to have been stacked in shipping containers if not buried in backyards.[15] It is estimated that 4,645 people died as a result of the hurricane, exceeding the official death count raised in August 2018 from 64 at first to 1,427 and then to 2,975.[16] An epidemic of leptospirosis occurred in the aftermath of María, despite denials from government officials.[17] Around 200,000 people left the territory in the wake of María, with an estimated 130,000 relocating permanently.[18] The president of the United States famously hurled paper towels at a crowd of survivors in the immediate aftermath, purportedly gesturing aid distribution, and stated that the US budget was "thrown out of whack" by the devastation. These gestures were the beginning of various attacks on Puerto Rico on Twitter. María clarified not only a humanitarian crisis underway, given a decade of austerity. It brought to light the depths

I.7 Humacao, Puerto Rico, September 27, 2017. Photo from *Metro Puerto Rico*.

I.8 Ceiba, Puerto Rico. 23,040,000 bottles of water found on tarmac, *El Vocero,* September 18, 2018. Photo from *El Vocero.*

of an unequal distribution of precariousness along race/gender/class lines in the territory. The Telegram chat, however, laid bare a well-functioning necropolitical state. It disproved the view that the debt crisis and mishandled hurricane relief and recovery index an absent state.

In February 2018, the now destitute Ricky Rosselló announced that Puerto Rico is "open for business."[19] The "aspiration" for rebuilding Puerto Rico was to be a "blank canvas for innovation."[20] Seeking to attract inves-

tors eager to take advantage of opportunities offered by a collapsed infrastructure, the governor stressed the benefits of the ambiguities of the territorial status.[21] As an unincorporated territory of the United States, political and economic rights and regulations in effect in states are lacking in Puerto Rico. Rosselló also highlighted the advantages of Puerto Rico's political economy under US colonial rule. Tax-exempt foreign investment has been the pillar of economic development for this unincorporated territory since 1917.[22] In addition to exemptions on corporate investment and bonds, Act 20/22 of 2012 offers wealthy individuals from the United States tax haven conditions in real estate. Rosselló further underscored the flexibility made possible by austerity measures. The 2017 labor reform reduced benefits and sick leave, increased probationary periods, facilitated layoffs, and lowered wages. A then pending education reform, health care revisions, and reduced allocations to municipalities and the public university system were framed as "right sizing" efforts favorable for investment.[23]

Rather than an expression of disaster capitalism, Rosselló's response indexes the relation of colonialism and coloniality distinctive to the case of Puerto Rico.[24] Minimally, colonialism refers to a form of juridico-political control. Aníbal Quijano's decolonial framework offers the notion of "coloniality of power," *colonialidad del poder*, which refers to a race/gender/class hierarchy posited by a colonial history but that exceeds colonialism as a juridico-political relation.[25] The concept of coloniality names the "afterlife," to borrow Saidiya Hartman's term, of the colonial project of capitalist modernity in postcolonial contexts.[26] It names the race/gender/class hierarchy installed by this project but that continues, rearticulated, in altered historical and material conditions. As an unincorporated territory of the United States, as a colony of the United States, the case of Puerto Rico presses us to consider the continuation of the colonial condition in its afterlife. The actualization of race/gender as the central technology of modernity/coloniality is guided by the operation of capital in its specificity, in the present juncture, neoliberal financialized capitalism. Ariadna Godreau-Aubert puts it best in a set of passages that I return to various times throughout this book: "The colony is what happens [*transcurre*] in 'repeated acts of capture.'"[27] "Indebted life," she adds, "is the continuation of colonial life."

Puerto Rico currently holds $74 billion of bond debt and $49 billion in unfunded pension obligations. Puerto Rico's $123 billion debt is the largest municipal debt in US history. In May 2017, Puerto Rico filed for bankruptcy under Title III of PROMESA.[28] This 2016 federal law instituted a

Fiscal Control Board. *La Junta*, as the board is known in the territory, is tasked with achieving fiscal responsibility and regaining access to capital markets. Debt restructuring is coupled with austerity, privatization, and other modes of dispossession in the board's efforts to ensure that creditors are repaid, that Puerto Rico's good standing is regained. The US-appointed board can override local government decisions that conflict with its aims, despite the fact that Puerto Rico has no voting representation in Congress and cannot cast a presidential vote. If filing for bankruptcy delegates some power to US District Court Judge Laura Taylor Swain, it nevertheless underscores the fact that the US Congress remains the seat of juridico-political sovereignty despite the creation of the Estado Libre Asociado in 1952. Restructuring deals for the Urgent Interest Fund Corporation (Corporación del Fondo de Interés Apremiante, COFINA) and Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica, PREPA) but also the bankruptcy plan unveiled in September 2019 not only mortgaged Puerto Rico's future. They have traded with life itself, raising utility costs, intensifying regressive taxation, and lowering or eliminating pensions. The deals and plan have been formulated and reached without an audit, despite a legal and political movement demanding an independent audit, particularly a citizen audit, since at least 2015.

Debt functions as a form of coloniality, I argue in the chapters that follow. In the Americas, as we will see in chapter 3, the independence debt France and its allies levied on Haiti in response to the successful slave revolt that founded the first black republic in the hemisphere is the first case of debt as an apparatus that continues the colonial condition.[29] In contemporary Puerto Rico, the focus of this book, debt actualizes, updates, reinstalls the colonial condition. However, it does so in ways that run deeper than the imposition of a Fiscal Control Board. It does more than further erode the purported sovereignty established by the Estado Libre Asociado, revealed to be none most recently by the 2016 US Supreme Court's *Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle* ruling. Debt functions as an apparatus of capture, predation, extraction in neoliberal financialized capitalism, according to Maurizio Lazzarato. It is a key apparatus for the creation and extraction of value in financialized capitalism, yet one that requires states for its actualization. As an apparatus of capture, I add, the operation of debt involves expulsion, dispossession, and precarization through which race/gender/class hierarchies are deepened, intensified, posited anew. Debt lands, *aterriza*, as Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero suggest, on bodies and populations. Debt's operation, its landing, I add, should be understood more precisely as a form of coloni-

I.9 Satirical obituary for ELA. "'Neither bread, nor land, nor liberty.' We are grateful to the country that has in one way or another withstood 64 years of political limbo. May the spirit of self-determination illuminate each of our hearts and give us courage to do the impossible. RIP." *Primera hora*, (daily newspaper), July 24, 2016. Translation by Adriana Garriga-López.

ality. It actualizes, adapts, reinscribes race/gender/class posited by the history of colonial violence that produced the modern capitalist world. Debt does so responding to altered material and historical conditions, building on rather than annihilating difference, incommensurability, heterogeneity in the very reproduction of life—in labor, authority, subjectivity. Debt, then, is key to the rearticulation/reinstallation of colonial life in the current economic-political juncture. In the case of Puerto Rico, the afterlife of the colonial world posits the colonial condition, the territorial status, anew. It does so by actualizing the work of race/gender/class evident in the unequal distribution of precariousness, dispossession, and violence in the territory.

This book aims to understand the operation of coloniality in the colony, centering the political economy that guides their relation in the present. This book also explores multiple attempts to interrupt this operation, considering variations of decolonial praxis in the territory. Two conceptual perspectives guide these aims. They are approximations to the language of "operation" and "interruption" central to the discussions that follow. The term *operation* seeks to name the effectivity—the work, the productivity—of an apparatus, norm, political-economic rationality, mode of perceiving and sensing but also desiring that articulate the world of capital/coloniality.[30] These do so in the

very material organization of existence, of binding existence in certain ways rather than others. They do so within the very reproduction of life, including the body, sensation, frameworks of sense but also land, the city, the ocean, the other.[31] Far from abstract, these are fundamentally concrete, heterogeneous, and simultaneous, as we will see. The operation of debt as an apparatus of capture, predation, dispossession, and expulsion, for example, is only clarified by the ways it lands on racialized/gendered bodies and populations. For this reason, we cannot speak of debt abstractly. We cannot speak of the creditor-debtor relation universally. We can offer a feminist reading of debt, as we will also see, but in the case of Puerto Rico it will require specifying debt's intensification of a racial hierarchy posited by the territory's multiple colonial histories.

"Interruption," on the other hand, seeks to name attempts to turn coloniality inoperative.[32] The variations of protest I examine draw from material conditions at specific political-economic junctures, seeking to seize the power to bind in order to articulate those conditions anew. That binding life anew, that organizing life in its very reproduction anew, that rearticulation of sensibility itself anew requires unbinding the world posited by capital/coloniality. As Frantz Fanon argues, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder."[33] These protests employ tactics of subversion, inversion, refusal, and rescue/occupation aimed at interrupting the operation of debt.[34] Specifically, they seek to turn the work of productivity, propriety, and private property central to the reproduction of capital/coloniality inoperative. They do so by inhabiting the strictures of debt, especially the injunction to repay and the positions of power it generates in the creditor-debtor relation. They also subvert or refuse the deferral involved in binding subjects and populations to determined conditions. Acts of subversion or refusal can aid the effectivity of coloniality/capital, to be sure. They can intensify rather than dismantle race/gender/class hierarchies within and through contexts of contestation, opposition, protest. Subversion or refusal that targets the work of race/gender/class even in a fraught political terrain, in contrast, interrupts, aiming to short-circuit their productivity here and now. The results are inevitably complex, as subversion and refusal entail forms of complicity that admit of simple cooption. The point is that complicity is often tactical, hence at the ready to respond to neoliberal cooptation.

The language of operation and interruption stem from two conceptual perspectives that emerge from the current predicament, as mentioned above. First, while I consider the current economic-political downturn as

the relation of colonialism and coloniality in the territory, it is important to underscore that the notion of coloniality does not track the legacy of the colonial violence that produced the modern capitalist world. The claim is stronger. Coloniality names the operation of contemporary capitalism's organization of existence by reproducing modalities of colonial violence that installed the modern capitalist world centuries ago. Hartman's notion of the afterlife of slavery, also rendered as the afterlife of property, is helpful here. It specifies the persistence of slavery in the present in the fact that "black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago."[35] She writes that "[t]his is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment." Elsewhere she adds that the afterlife of property is "the detritus of lives with which we have yet to attend, a past that has yet to be done, and the ongoing state of emergency in which black life remains in peril."[36] The afterlife of slavery/property is not a legacy, then, if by legacy we understand the result of something past or passed on. It is rather an operating rationality and sensibility organizing the very reproduction of life through the attrition of life in the present. In the case of Puerto Rico, in the life of the colonized, skewed life chances and spectacular forms of violence are both also part of the ordinary. Both index the productivity of colonial violence in the present. The present *is* the past, then, in altered material-historical conditions.

I do not want to suggest that Hartman's exposition of the continuation of a racial calculus that imperils black lives in the United States today is simply transferable to the case of Puerto Rico, however. This would run the risk of rendering invisible different histories in need of exposition, although I insist that centering the afterlife of slavery and hence the antiblack violence that structures race/gender/class hierarchies in Puerto Rico today is crucial.[37] I want to expand on this key moment in Hartman to understand the backward positing of the work of coloniality in the colony. Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that coloniality represents a "veritable metaphysical catastrophe." Coloniality posits a world to the measure of colonial violence at the level of power, being, knowledge, and sensing. The technology of race/gender produces ideas of the human and nonhuman in the organization of labor, in the production of subjectivity and knowledge, in the articulation of political authority. It functions by establishing populations racialized as nonwhite as subject to ubiquitous violence in such articulation of existence. The race/gender norm, as María Lugones puts it, works as a tool to "damn"

the colonized by establishing a lack of proximity to humanity.[38] I discuss these concepts in detail in the chapters that follow. The point here is that coloniality operates as a backward positing. The metaphysical catastrophe that coloniality represents, Maldonado-Torres writes, is "informed by and helped to advance the demographic catastrophes of indigenous genocide in the Americas and the middle passage, as well as racial slavery, among other forms of massacre and systematic dehumanization in the early modern world."[39] The productivity, the ongoing effectivity or work, of the infrastructures of sense put in place by catastrophes of demographic nature, I argue, represent the actualization and thereby reinstallation of the colonial project of capitalist modernity at the metaphysical level. They represent the positing of the world to the measure of colonial violence anew, in light of altered material and historical conditions. In the case of Puerto Rico, coloniality posits the colony anew. As a form of coloniality, debt posits the colony anew—within and through the strictures of financialized neoliberal capitalism. The present *is* the past.

Second, and for this reason, decoloniality is a matter of turning the present into the past. It entails disorder, to recall Fanon. It entails "practical and metaphysical revolt," as Maldonado-Torres suggests. Rather than liberation or freedom, however, I argue that decoloniality is a praxis that seeks to unbind the world of capital/coloniality, intervening in material conditions to dislocate modes of power, being, knowing, and sensing. Notions of liberation or freedom must also be unbound from the image of the capitalist/colonial world. Hence, I focus on variations of material praxis that attend to present material conditions. Many of these practices deploy the language of freedom, sovereignty, and solidarity, but the content of those terms is prefigured, rather than stated, by the reorganization of life itself. The content is articulated in and by a material praxis that alters the relation to land, the city, the coast, the ocean, the body, the other. Such approximation is suggested through subversion, thus in complex proximity with that which it aims to dismantle. This is why such praxis is easily coopted, even complicit with capital/coloniality despite the fact that it seeks to disorder that very world.[40] Land rescue/occupation, defiant refusal, queer laziness, as we will see, are exemplary of attempts to unbind and bind anew, disarticulate and rearticulate anew, turn inoperative and initiate new forms of doing, being, sensing—all in all, relating. The point here, to recall Hartman, is "the detritus of lives with which we have yet to attend, a past that has yet to be done." Decoloniality is a material praxis that attends to the ongoing productivity of the demographic catastrophes that installed the modern capitalist world,

thereby interrupting the reinstallation of the metaphysical catastrophe that coloniality represents.

Subversive interruption can be seen as a form of historical reckoning, I thus argue in the chapters that follow. Interruption turns inoperative the work of coloniality in the present juncture by inhabiting and subverting the strictures of debt. Decoloniality is a material praxis that turns coloniality inoperative by short-circuiting its strictures. Interruption is subversive, rather than reifying, when it targets the reproduction of a race/gender/class hierarchy through the asymmetry debt generates in the creditor-debtor relation, through the deferral debt requires to exercise control. A debt is a bind. In this context, it is a promise to repay that binds parties to a future purportedly irrespective of changing conditions. Unpayable debts, unpaid debts, function as markers of culpability—a broken promise, a failure to meet oneself in the future. Culpability legitimates the injunction to repay, installing modes of subjection through subjectivation that actualize, update, rearticulate race/gender/class in the colony. Culpability and the injunction to repay makes possible, however, indexing material conditions that led to the promise and its fulfillment or failure. Financial debts leave a trace, then. They admit an audit. They are subject to accounting, to account giving. Subversion and refusal of repayment seek to turn the work of culpability inoperative by capturing account giving. They invert collection itself, capturing accountability. They do so, moving from financial debts to historical debts. This move is not an exit from the histories that install specific material conditions. On the contrary. It has the power to interrupt the work of historical, indeed colonial, debts by capturing financial debts that posit the former anew. Audits can function accordingly, as a political tool of accountability rather than as a mechanism by which access to financial markets is regained.

In the case of Puerto Rico, to move from financial to historical debts is to address colonial debts. This shift makes possible more than linking financial debts to government corruption or, more generally, the political economy of Puerto Rico under US colonial rule. It makes possible specifying the work of debt as a form of coloniality, linking current financial debts with the reinstallation of a race/gender/class hierarchy in the colony. Moving from financial debts to historical debts makes possible elucidating not only the effects but the effectivity of austerity, for example, through race/gender/class. I suggest that subversive interruption can therefore be seen as spaces-times of confrontation with the colony as well as coloniality. Some of the cases I examine, in particular concerning the subversion of private

property, can even be said to turn decoloniality into a form of reparation. They do so, however, beyond the juridical paradigm of reparative justice. They invert the position of the creditor and the debtor, inverting who owes what to whom by taking back what is owed. They seek to posit life beyond the strictures of private property, challenging private property itself. They aim to generate infrastructures for a life yet to come from within material conditions here and now. They affirm that we, in fact, are all heirs taking back rather than paying back.

ROADMAP

The conceptual perspectives described above are developed in detail throughout the chapters that follow. I offer them as provisional approximations in light of my engagement with the intellectual-practical production in Puerto Rico about Puerto Rico at the center of the book. Concepts emerge from a specific historical, economic, political juncture, whether that is made explicit or not. Whether they elucidate other contexts is not a matter philosophy or theory ought to try to settle, but rather for those who are compelled or repelled by them to address. Puerto Rico is not a case study of the concepts developed in the chapters that follow, then. It is not a mere "example." Neither is the specificity of Puerto Rico's current predicament universalizable, although this is not to say that Puerto Rico is marked by singularity. On the contrary. The chapters that follow seek points of contact with as well as divergence from other histories of the production of and opposition to the world of capital/coloniality. They invite engagement with other histories within and beyond Puerto Rico.

"Neoliberal Coloniality," chapter 1, examines Maurizio Lazzarato's work on debt as an apparatus of capture and as a mode of subjection through subjectivation in postfinancial crisis neoliberal capitalism. It moves from Lazzarato's account of the "making of the indebted man" (*la fabbrica dell'uomo indebitato*) to Ariadna Godreau-Aubert's notes toward a "pedagogy of the indebted woman" (*una pedagogía de las endeudadas*). For Lazzarato, debt intensifies core features of the neoliberal project by reterritorializing value creation and the capture of value in apparatuses deemed as "destructive": the technocratic state's use of taxation and austerity and its modes of subjection in the figure of the "indebted man." Verónica Gago, Luci Cavallero, and Rita Segato's work presses us to rewrite Lazzarato's account of the work of debt, specifying the way debt "lands [*aterriza*] in diverse territories, economies, bodies, and conflicts," to quote Gago and Cavallero. I extend this analysis,

arguing that debt should be understood as a form of coloniality. Aníbal Quijano's notion of the coloniality of power and Nelson Maldonado-Torres's Fanonian rendition of coloniality as a metaphysical catastrophe are key here. I examine Godreau-Aubert's exposition of the relation between debt, austerity, and coloniality in Puerto Rico. The cartography of debt that a pedagogy of the indebted woman makes possible maps the necropolitical effects of austerity, specifically in relation to women, with particular attention to black women, in the racial feminization of poverty and in femicide. It thereby maps the work of coloniality in the indebted colony.

Colonial Exceptionality, chapter 2, examines José Atiles-Osoria's notion of a "colonial state of exception," which seeks to illuminate Puerto Rico's juridico-political status and the conditions of capture it generates. Atiles-Osoria draws from this discussion to develop the notion "neoliberal colonialism," which explains the installation of neoliberal rationality through the increase in use of declarations of states of emergency in the administration of the colony. I argue that the analytics of exceptionality does not track the relation between colonialism and coloniality through its material conditions and effects. Miriam Muñiz-Varela and Anayra Santory-Jorge's conceptions of an "economy of the catastrophe" and "catastrophe by attrition," in contrast, center material conditions and effects that exceed the decision of a sovereign. Their work elucidates the "slow death" of neoliberal coloniality, as Lauren Berlant's notion suggests, though Muñiz-Varela stresses the spectacular forms of violence that make up the ordinary in the indebted colony. I discuss Marisol LeBrón's work here as well, specifically in relation to the forms of "punitive governance" central to the economy of the catastrophe that Muñiz-Varela clarifies. I pay attention to how debt lands on black masculinity and masculinity racialized as nonwhite in this context. These discussions transform Berlant's notion of the "environment" of slow death in financialized capitalism into the "weather," more specifically, the "climate" of indebted life in the colony. The latter draws from Yarimar Bonilla's engagement with Christina Sharpe's work. I argue that the environment as climate, rather than political-juridical control, is the site of colonial exceptionality. It exhibits a state of emergency that is not the exception but the rule.

"Historical Reckoning," chapter 3, explores the subversive potential of the reversibility of debt made possible by its strictures. David Graeber's account of the social logic of debt as a combination of equality and hierarchy is insightful. It makes clear that debt operates by installing asymmetry and deferral. I engage two critical theories of debt that draw from

Marx to elucidate debt as a site of subversion and social rearticulation. I examine two core assumptions that require attention in this context. Debt discloses irreducible social bonds *or* it indexes the material and historical conditions that produce a sociality reconfigured by debt. Debt is either a site of restitution of a fundamental interdependence *or* a site of reckoning with the potential to dismantle material and historical conditions that produced debt in the first place. Turning to Godreau-Aubert's work on debt and coloniality in Puerto Rico once more, I argue that debt is a site of subversive interruption that involves moving from financial debts to historical debts. This move remains an exposition of material conditions, however. Subversive interruption seizes the power to bind that instituted historical debts reproduced in financial debts. Historical reckoning is subversive if it interrupts modes of binding of a debt economy *and* the race/gender/class hierarchy that it reinstalls. I discuss debates concerning a debt audit in this context as well as interventions by la Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, a political project that follows the tradition of black feminism in the struggle against heteropatriarchy, antiblack violence, and capitalism, exemplary of historical reckoning.[41]

"Subversive Interruption," chapter 4, explores the aesthetic/epistemic strictures of hopeful protest through a reflection on the political power of failure. Guillermo Rebollo-Gil's notion of *pasarse políticamente*, to politically cross the line, specifies failed protest as the power of refusal as well as subversion of norms through which coloniality operates. The norm of productivity is central in this context. Productivity links race and gender in light of the specific economic, political, and historical juncture. Pasarse políticamente clarifies the inadvertent or explicit subversion or refusal of productivity that goes beyond normative measure. I begin with Rebollo-Gil's account of the 2010–11 student strike at the University of Puerto Rico. This discussion maps the aesthetic/epistemic terrain in which opposition to austerity, the Fiscal Control Board, and government corruption has been pursued in the colony. I then examine the operation of the norm of productivity within the distinctively neoliberal work ethic that Miguel Rodríguez-Casellas calls *echarpalantismo* (forward-facing resilience). Mabel Rodríguez-Centeno's extension of Rodríguez-Casellas's critique of echarpalantismo in what she calls *vagancia queer* (queer laziness) clarifies strictures of the subversive interruption of productivity.[42] In this context, I explore the subversive potential of the July 2019 protests that ousted Rosselló in challenging the aesthetic/epistemic coordinates of protest.

"Decoloniality as Reparations," the conclusion to the book, discusses Maldonado-Torres's distinction between decolonization and decoloniality, building on my suggestion that Quijano's concept of coloniality of power should be understood in light of Hartman's notion of the afterlife of slavery/property. I argue that decoloniality is a material praxis that turns the present into the past and explore the material praxis of land "rescue" (*rescate*) or "occupation" (*ocupación*) that seeks to unbind the world of capital taking back what is owed. Through a reading of Fanon's engagement with the question of reparations, I argue that these can be seen as reparations beyond a juridical paradigm. In Puerto Rico, this material praxis challenges private property, seeking to build power in common by rescuing the common(s). It attempts to turn inoperative the reinstallation of the colony/coloniality through new rounds of enclosure in the context of the debt crisis and the aftermath of Hurricane María. Liliana Cotto-Morales, Érika Fontánez-Torres, Miriam Muñiz-Varela, and Marina Moscoso's works are key here. They assess the long-standing praxis in Puerto Rico of interrupting the colonial lives of property through taking back land (*toma de terrenos*)—the countryside, the coast, the city. A new round of land rescue/occupation underway takes back what Muñiz-Varela calls the "taken island." The territory is an occupied land through the multiple rounds of colonial/capitalist capture that comprise its history. It is taken *and* rescued/occupied anew in and through the current economic juncture. I end with a reflection on the notion of pessimism as the site of hope.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

For the epigraph, see Raquel Salas Rivera, "coats are not exchanged for coats," *lo terciario/the tertiary* (Oakland, CA: Infinite Light, 2018), 20–21. A Spanish version of the poem is in this bilingual edition.

1 Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, an independent investigative journalist, released eleven pages of the thread on July 8. I discuss the protests in chap. 4.

2 See, e.g., Cristina P. Díaz, Jorge Lefevre, and Claudia Becerra, ed., *No. Impromptu: The Puerto Rico Review*, July 2019, http://www.thepuertoricoreview.com/rickyrenuncia.

3 See Kilómetro Cero's report: https://www.kilometro0.org/blog-desde-cero, and Rima Brusi, "Why Puerto Rico's Cops Ignore the Constitution at Night," *The Nation,* July 30, 2019, https://www.thenation.com/article/puerto-rico-police-abuse/.

4 Throughout, I use the gender inclusive "x" in Spanish, a practice ubiquitous among the queer community in Puerto Rico.

5 See Yarimar Bonilla's discussion of prefigurative politics in *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

6 See Yarimar Bonilla's post on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156683956480888&set=pcb.10156683956550888&type=3&theater.

7 Yarimar Bonilla, "Puerto Rican Politics Will Never Be the Same," *Jacobin*, August 2, 2019, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/08/puerto-rico-ricardo-rossello-governor-unrest. On autogestión, see Adriana Garriga-López, "Puerto Rico: The Future in Question," *Shima* 13, no. 2 (2019). See also Beatriz Llenín-Figueroa, "The Maroons Are Deathless, We Are Deathless," *Radical History Review*, https://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/?p=3145.

8 As a Category 5 Hurricane, María devastated Dominica, making landfall as a Category 4 in Puerto Rico as a result.

9 Arelis R. Hernández and Brady Dennis, "Desperate Puerto Ricans Line Up for Water—At a Hazardous-Waste Site," *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/10/16/desperate-puerto-ricans-line-up-for-water-at-a-hazardous-waste-site/. See also Adriana Garriga-López, "Agua Dulce," in *Liquid Utility, e-flux architecture* 103 (2019).

10 See Leysa Caro González, "Más vulnerables las mujeres tras el paso de María," *El Nuevo día,* July 10, 2018, https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/masvulnerableslasmujerestraselpasodemaria-2434047/.

11 See Víctor Rodríguez Velázquez, "Personas trans sufren el desastre de María desde la marginalización," *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, September 23, 2019, http://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2019/09/personas-trans-sufren-el-desastre-de-maria-desde-la-marginacion/.

12 Mara Pastor, "Ven la luz al final del camino," *Metro Puerto Rico*, August 15, 2018, https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2018/08/15/ven-la-luz-al-final-del-camino.html.

13 See Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico: https: //www.ayudalegalpuertorico.org/nuestros-proyectos/derecho-a-tu-casa/. See also, e.g., Wilma Maldonado Arrigoitía, "Las Comunidades están alertas ante los posibles intentos de expropiación," *El Nuevo día*, August 14, 2018, https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/lascomunidadesestanalertasantelosposiblesintentosdeexpropiacion-2441110/.

14 The Jones Act of 1920 restricts maritime commerce in US waters and between US ports by establishing that goods transported between these must be carried on ships built, flagged, and crewed by the United States. See chap. 2 for a discussion of the act.

15 In January 2020 a swarm of earthquakes with epicenters in the southwest of Puerto Rico disclosed the continuation of a necropolitical state: a crumbling infrastructure, failed distribution of aid and adequate shelter for children and the elderly, failure to inspect schools that would serve as shelters or house children on their return from the holidays. On January 18, 2020, citizens stormed a

warehouse in the southern town of Ponce found to be full of unused emergency supplies, some dating to the period just after Hurricane María. Thirteen such warehouses were identified and placed under government surveillance. See my dispatch for *Critical Times*, "Checklists: On Puerto Rico's SoVerano" 3, no. 2 (2020).

16 See Omaya Sosa Pascual, Ana Campoy, and Michael Weissenstein, "Los Muertos de María," *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, http://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2018/09/los-muertos-de-maria/.

17 Omaya Sosa Pascual and John Sutter, "Puerto Rico tuvo un brote de leptospirosis tras el Huracán María pero el gobierno no lo dice," *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, July 3, 2018, http://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2018/07/puerto-rico-tuvo-un-brote-de-leptospirosis-tras-el-huracan-maria-pero-el-gobierno-no-lo-dice/.

18 See Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, March 2018: https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/data_sheets/PostMaria-NewEstimates-3–15–18.pdf. That is, 4 percent of the population relocated. In October 2019, José Caraballo Cueto, director of the Centro de Información Censal, indicated that in 2018 149,000 people left the territory, representing 4.3 percent of the population. See "La Emigración registrada en 2018 en la isla fue la más alta desde 2006," *El Nuevo día*, October 4, 2019, https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/laemigracionregistradaen2018enlaislafuelamasaltadesde2006–2521683/.

19 See Yarimar Bonilla, "For Investors, Puerto Rico Is a Fantasy Blank Slate," *The Nation*, February 28, 2018, https://www.thenation.com/article/for-investors-puerto-rico-is-a-fantasy-blank-slate/.

20 See also Katy Steinmetz, "Governor Ricardo Rosselló: Puerto Rico Is a 'Geopolitical Black Hole,'" *Time*, May 9, 2018, //time.com/5271767/puerto-rico-governor-donald-trump-statehood-hurricane-maria/.

21 I am following Bonilla, "For Investors, Puerto Rico Is a Fantasy Blank Slate."

22 See chap. 2, where I discuss the political economy of Puerto Rico.

23 See Bonilla, "For Investors, Puerto Rico Is a Fantasy Blank Slate."

24 For an analysis of Hurricane María as exemplary of disaster capitalism, see Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), and *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico before and after the Storm*, ed. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019). See also Hilda Lloréns, "The Race of Disaster: Black Communities and the Crisis in Puerto Rico," *Black Perspectives*, April 17, 2019, https://www.aaihs.org/the-race-of-disaster-black-communities-and-the-crisis-in-puerto-rico/.

25 See Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social," in *Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein, Journal of World Systems Research* 6, no. 2 (2000); all translations are my own. A general presentation of decolonial thought can be found in Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "The Decolonial Turn," in *New Approaches*

to Latin American Studies: Culture and Power, ed. Juan Poblete (London: Routledge, 2018). See also Santiago Castro Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *El Giro decolonial: Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá, Colombia: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007). For a general overview of decolonial feminism, see Breny Mendoza, "The Coloniality of Gender and Power: From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See especially Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso and Karina Ochoa, eds., *Tejiendo de otro modo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2014); and Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, ed., *Feminismo descolonial: Nuevos aportes teóricos-metodológicos a más de una década* (Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2018).

26 See Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), and *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

27 Ariadna Godreau-Aubert, *Las Propias: Apuntes para una pedagogía de las endeudadas* (Cabo Rojo, PR: Editora Educación Emergente, 2018), 68; all translations are my own.

28 See H.R. 5278, 114th Congress (2015–16).

29 See, e.g., Anthony Phillips, "Haiti, France, and the Independence Debt of 1825," Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (2008); Simon Henochsberg, "Public Debt and Slavery: The Case of Haiti (1760–1915)" (PhD diss., Paris School of Economics, 2016); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989); and Jérôme Duval, "Haiti: de la Colonización francesa a la esclavitud económica de la deuda," Comité para la Abolición de las Deudas Ilegítimas (CADTM), 26 de Septiembre de 2017, http://www.cadtm.org/Haiti-de-la-colonizacion-francesa. See my discussion in chap. 3.

30 Cf. Sandro Mezzadra and Bret Neilson, *The Politics of Operation: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019). See Verónica Gago, *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*, trans. Liz Mason-Deese (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

31 For my use of "reproduction of life," see Tithi Battacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: The Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Battacharya (New York: Pluto Press, 2017).

32 For a full account of my view of interruption with reference to Walter Benjamin, see my "Pasarse *Políticamente*—Interrupting Neoliberal Temporalities in Puerto Rico," *Collective Temporalities and the Construction of the Future*,

ed. María del Rosario Acosta and Gustavo Quintero, *Diacritics* 46, no. 2 (2018).

33 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 2.

34 At various junctures in this book, I use and explore the language of "occupation" used and explored by those whose work I am engaging. I thematize the complexities of the language of occupation in the conclusion, when I examine land "rescue"/"occupation." There I work with Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012). On the language of "occupy," see also Adam J. Barker, "Already Occupied: Indigenous Peoples, Settler Colonialism and the Occupy Movements in North America," *Social Movements Studies* 11 (2012).

35 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

36 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26, no. 12/2 (2008), 13.

37 See especially Isar P. Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and US Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Ileana Rodriguez-Silva, *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism and National Identities in Puerto Rico* (London: Palgrave, 2012); and Hilda Lloréns, *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender during the American Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

38 See María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010).

39 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," Foundation Frantz Fanon (2016) 11, https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/.

40 See Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures*, for a discussion of the subversions of sovereignty. Relevant here as well is the politics of *jaibería*, which sought to subvert the colonial predicament in the 1990s, albeit by affirming statehood. See, e.g., Ramón Grosfoguel and Frances Negrón-Muntaner, eds. *Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Frances Negrón-Muntaner, ed., *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2007). Cf. my "Boundary, Ambivalence, *Jaibería*, or, How to Appropriate Hegel," *Creolizing the Canon*, ed. Michael Monahan (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

41 This is la Colectiva's self-description. See https://www.facebook.com/Colectiva.Feminista.PR/. See their two core manifestos: *La Manifiesta*, 2017, https://www.scribd.com/document/263057948/La-Manifiesta-Colectiva-Feminista-en-Construccion, and *Manifiesto Antirracista*, June 2, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/notes/colectiva-feminista-en-construcci%C3%B3n/manifiesto-antirracista-colectiva-feminista-en-construcci%C3%B3n/2968317379926640. In English, see *The Anti-Racist Manifesto*, in *Latino Rebels*, June 7, 2020, https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/06/07/antiracistmanifesto/. See also my "Black

Feminist Tactics: On la Colectiva Feminista en Construcción's Politics without Guarantee," in *The Decolonial Geographies of Puerto Rico's 2019 Summer Protests: A Forum for Society and Space*, ed. Marisol LeBrón and Joaquín Villanueva (February 2020), where I discuss la Colectiva's black feminist, decolonial methodology and the actions through which it is developed at length.

42 Most recently, she works with "cuir" rather than "queer," especially with reference to Sayak Valencia's work. See Rodríguez-Centeno's "Antiproductivismo y (trans)feminismo en tiempos de trap y capitalismo gore: El Caso de Puerto Rico" (unpublished ms.); and Valencia's *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2018).

CHAPTER ONE. NEOLIBERAL COLONIALITY

1 Ariadna Godreau-Aubert, "Aviso," in *Las Propias: Apuntes para una pedagogía de las endeudadas* (Cabo Rojo, PR: Editora Educación Emergente, 2018), 15; all translations are my own. The Spanish reads: "'Estar en deuda' es un estado material, politico, económico, social, afectivo. Significa tener y, al mismo tiempo, saberse desposeído de algo. Por lo mismo, deber es estar—temporal o permanentemente—en ninguna parte."

2 Godreau-Aubert, *Las Propias*, 67.

3 Godreau-Aubert, *Las Propias*, 15: "[I]nsistiré en la distancia entre prometer (deberse) y deber." See chapter 3.

4 A translation of "Nosotras que no nos debemos a nadie: Las Propias en tiempos de austeridad y deuda pública" as "We Women Who Don't Owe Anyone: Las Propias in Times of Austerity and Debt" by Tara Phillips is forthcoming in "On Debt, Blame, and Responsibility: Feminist Resistance in the Colony of Puerto Rico," ed. Rocío Zambrana, special section of *Critical Times*. All translations in this book, as noted above, are my own.

5 Godreau-Aubert, *Las Propias*, 68: "La colonia es lo que transcurre en 'repetidos actos de captura.'" Godreau-Aubert is quoting Ann Stoler, who writes: "A 'colony' criminalizes dissidence, disassembles and punishes those who refuse its terms, and suppresses contestatory and participatory politics. It produces and identifies enemies within and outside, eagerly invests in the hunt for those targeted as a threat, anxiously celebrates the ever false and short-lived security that follows the repeated rites of capture" (*Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016], 76).

6 Godreau-Aubert, *Las Propias*, 67.

7 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism, the Financial Crisis and the End of the Liberal State," *Theory, Culture and Society* 32, nos. 7–8 (2015): 67–68. He continues: "These subjective novelties reveal more clearly, and at a more fundamental level, the true nature of techniques of governmentality and of the relation between liberalism and capital than in the period when neoliberalism was emergent." See also Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt*, trans. Joshua