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# Julia de Burgos, Embodied Excess, and (Un)Silenced Memory: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis of Performances of Resistance

## Abstract

My dissertation makes an argument for a decolonial move in rhetorical memory studies to more ethically account for the ways in which colonized women in the Global South, like Puerto Rican poet and revolutionary Julia de Burgos, have resisted the trauma colonization has systemically wrought against gendered, raced, and classed bodies. Building from a decolonization methodology, and theoretically situating my argument in Chicana, Latina, and decolonial feminisms, I argue Burgos's poetry both bears faithful witness to the violence of US imperial rule and articulates the dangers of a Puerto Rican nationalist movement built on a Spanish colonial foundation. Approaching Burgos as a woman negotiating her history and present from a third space identity, I contend memory studies must move away from an emphasis of state-sponsored narratives and embrace decolonial notions of commemoration, such as performance. Performative commemoration both allows for lived, collective experience and resists the tendency of the state to coopt memory in the interest of neoliberal diversity.

My dissertation is organized in six chapters. Within the introduction, I outline my project and introduce my methodological and theoretical commitments. Chapter Two provides historical context for the ways in which Spanish colonialism and US imperialism have worked to systemically marginalize, sexualize, and erase Puerto Rican women along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Using extratextual analysis, Chapter Three explores how colonization is upheld through public memory projects/ state narratives of middlebrow multiculturalism as I examine the USPS-issued Julia de Burgos stamp. In Chapter Four, I examine how Burgos herself resisted coloniality in the through her use of an autoethnographic persona in her poetry. I build a case to argue the ways in which Burgos negotiates memory and constructs a decolonial imaginary provides a path for those who will later seek to commemorate her legacy outside of the scope of the state. Chapter Five, then, examines how this negotiation persists in the Carmen Rivera play *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water*. I argue that Rivera's play, in witnessing through performance, provides an example of decolonial collective memory. My dissertation concludes with a call for beginning memory scholarship from within a differential consciousness.

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Analysis of Performances of Resistance

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Sara Johanna Baugh

June 2019

Advisor: Dr. Bernadette Marie Calafell

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Title: Julia De Burgos, Embodied Excess, and (un)Silenced Memory: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis of Performances of Resistance

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My dissertation makes an argument for a decolonial move in rhetorical memory studies to more ethically account for the ways in which colonized women in the Global South, like Puerto Rican poet and revolutionary Julia de Burgos, have resisted the trauma colonization has systemically wrought against gendered, raced, and classed bodies. Building from a decolonization methodology, and theoretically situating my argument in Chicana, Latina, and decolonial feminisms, I argue Burgos's poetry both bears faithful witness to the violence of US imperial rule and articulates the dangers of a Puerto Rican nationalist movement built on a Spanish colonial foundation. Approaching Burgos as a woman negotiating her history and present from a third space identity, I contend memory studies must move away from an emphasis of state-sponsored narratives and embrace decolonial notions of commemoration, such as performance. Performative commemoration both allows for lived, collective experience and resists the tendency of the state to coopt memory in the interest of neoliberal diversity.

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## Chapter 1: Why Remember Julia de Burgos?

My mother's family is the family I know. Her/our stories are the stories in my bones. Driving around Southeastern Arizona, my grandmother told me stories of the Valle de Guadalupe, where my Gangy<sup>1</sup> had grown up in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. Where she'd married young, and then lost a child to conditions of poverty. Where her husband had left her to try and earn money in the United States, only to die in the mines of Arizona. The place she, too, left with her father and young daughter, walking to an Arizona border town called Douglas. When I was eleven, my grandmother, her youngest daughter, once drove me by a windmill near Douglas. "Mirá!" she said, "Look. Gangy used to wash at that ranch." We drove on, and she again told me stories I'd heard my whole life: stories that had already become more my memories than anything I had experienced in my short life. How my grandmother had married again and moved to Tombstone, baking pies and washing clothes to support the family only to have her husband often steal the money for booze. How she had fled to the town where I grew up, Benson, Arizona, a small town that had grown from a stop on the Butterfield Stage line to support those chasing their fortunes in copper across Southern Arizona. There, my Gangy continued washing clothes, keeping my grandmother and great uncle out of school for a time, afraid their father would try to kidnap them. Eventually, she began cooking at the

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<sup>1</sup> My great-grandmother, Agapita Pérez.

Horseshoe Cafe, a local restaurant owned by the Corbets, a rich, white ranching family. Gangy cooked there for most of the rest of her life. Although she died before I was born, I joined the legacy of all the women in my family who worked in the same kitchen. My grandmother, my mother, my cousin, and I all carted dishes and, presumably, heard the same stories about our Gangy as told by the last living Corbet.

I worked there in 2002, in the summer after my first year of college. Gangy had died in 1978, but the owner still wanted to talk to me about “Grant,” the Anglo name the owner’s family had used for my great-grandmother. The owner was kind to me, but her stories about Gangy were all spun into an ill-suited romance between my great-grandmother and the owner’s uncle. By the owner’s telling, her uncle had loved Gangy, but he was required to marry a rich woman to fulfill his family’s expectations. Still, “Grant” patiently waited for him to come in every day, “watching the door,” seemingly pining for the rest of her life, longing for a few brief moments of happiness. When I asked my grandma about this story, her response was, “That’s bullshit.” She proceeded to tell me a far different version of their affair. Of course, my great-grandmother was a poor Mexican woman, and I suppose some might read it as a compliment that she remains in the memories of anyone outside our family. I would argue that this is the problem with memory studies: the stories that circulate always privilege the memories and the values of those in power.

This brings me to Julia de Burgos.

I first encountered the Puerto Rican poet through her poem “A Julia de Burgos” [To Julia de Burgos]. Within the poem, Burgos uses a first person “I,” often considered by

scholars to be either Burgos's soul or an alternate personality, to challenge societal expectations. The "I" attacks Burgos's adherence to social norms, which she argues have stripped Burgos of her agency and freedom. The "I" admonishes Julia: "Tú en tí misma no mandas; a ti todos te mandan; / en tí mandan tu esposo, tus padres, tus parientes." [You in yourself have no say; everyone governs you; / your husband, your parents, your family] (4). Conversely, the "I" declares herself beholden to no one. Burgos's "I" proclaims: "En mí no, que en mí manda mi solo corazón, / mi solo pensamiento; quien manda en mí soy yo." [Not in me, in me only my heart governs / only my thought; who governs me is me] (5). Free from all social constraints, the "I" in Burgos's poem is liberated from normative expectations. Where the public face of Julia de Burgos is the "fría muñeca de mentira social" [cold doll of social lies] and "miel de cortesanas hipocresías" [the honey of courtesan hypocrisies], the "I" is "viril destello de la humana verdad" [*virile starburst of the human truth*] (4). As I read this poem, I was struck by the deft way in which Burgos, the poet, critiques both the performance of the normative and the restrictive nature of what we might term civility. In an oft-quoted line, the "I" reminds Julia, "Tú eres solo la grave señora señorona; / yo no; yo soy la vida, la fuerza, la mujer." [You are only the ponderous lady very lady; / not me; I am life, strength, woman] (4). Julia, the "I" argues, is weighed down by appearances and expectations, whereas she, the "I" persona, unfettered by these rules, encompasses the very essence of life, strength, and womanhood.

As I read this poem over and over again, I wanted greater context about Julia de Burgos, the poet. Yet, my initial search kept coming back to the commemorative Julia de

Burgos stamp released by the United States Postal Service in 2010. While a short biographical blurb attended the USPS press announcement, it hardly rendered Burgos distinguishable from any other woman writer, Puerto Rican or otherwise. It branded Burgos a “revolutionary writer, thinker and activist,” but her revolutionary style is stripped down to the simplest mention of “groundbreaking works” urging “women, minorities, and the poor to defy social conventions and find their own true selves” (Suarez Casey). This bare sketch of Burgos was hardly in keeping with the richness of the poet’s own words. As a scholar and a Latina, I was dissatisfied knowing that this flat commemoration of Burgos would carry, through the expansive circulation of the USPS, the broadest resonance. Moreover, as I began to more thoroughly research Burgos’s life, as shaped by the vestiges of colonial Spanish patriarchy and the contemporary domination of US imperialism, the USPS vision of Burgos as a public memory project became even more troubling as project of continued colonization.

Thus, in this dissertation, I hope to accomplish two things. First, I wish to honor Burgos’s rhetorical legacy and influence on her own terms and in her own historical context. This is not a recovery project. As I will outline below, I build from a decolonial methodology to practice what Maria Lugones calls “faithful witnessing” (*Peregrinajes/Pilgrimages* 4). I am particularly interested in Burgos’s writing and life because the ways in which she performed resistance against coloniality reveal a form of proto-decolonial feminism. Burgos was highly aware of the nexus of oppressions impacting herself and the people of Puerto Rico, and she gave voice to the ways in which these intersectional oppressions were complicated by migration in the diaspora. Burgos

engages in embodied resistance as she bears witness in her poetry to the colonial and imperial violences which simultaneously erase her agency while rendering her body hypervisible. Embracing and transgressing her colonially-imposed excesses, Burgos is able to negotiate embodied memory and construct an imaginary which creates decolonial possibility for herself and Puerto Rico. Thus, I argue that the way in which Burgos negotiates her excess and renders socially-inscribed silences “hearable” is a rhetorical performance which demands further attention.

Second, I build from Latina, Chicana, and Black feminisms, in conjunction with queer of color and performance theories, to challenge how rhetorical studies approaches memory scholarship. Through several chapters, I contrast the problematic public memory work of the USPS with what I claim as an example of decolonial commemoration in Carmen Rivera’s play *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water*. Drawing from the work of Vanessa Pérez Rosario, who traces the ways in which Burgos’s life and influence have been remembered, I investigate Rivera’s play as a commemoration through performance of excess, which illuminates or confronts the silences surrounding Burgos’s life as depicted in Western/Anglo memories. Importantly, Rivera’s play also draws from the playwright’s own sense of *puertorriqueñidad*. Contextualizing Rivera’s play through the work of other Burgos historians, including Pérez Rosario and Burgos translator Jack Agüeros, I argue Rivera provides a distinct way to examine how Burgos is remembered from a rhetorical perspective Darrel Wanzer-Serrano describes as “situated public discourse” (322). Moreover, I’m interested in how Rivera performs her own form of resistance by operating as what Chela Sandoval calls a “middle voice” (156), working to

create a differential consciousness and reconfiguring an element of Puerto Rican history that rebuts a flat colonial narrative. Building from Burgos's theorization of embodied memory as transformation, I argue that Rivera's play, particularly when read against a USPS-sponsored public memory project, elucidates the limitations of rhetorical public memory scholarship while offering a more ethical alternative. In the next few paragraphs, then, I illustrate a need to build from rhetorical public memory scholarship to embrace the possibilities presented within performance scholarship for exploring embodied intersectionalities.

In discussing the rhetorical dimensions of history, Bradford Vivian writes that history is a "creation of the past that takes place in the present" (551). Within this process of creation, or "reconstruction," Vivian explains a "willed forgetting" that frequently occurs, particularly in official histories, to "make the past lucid and uniform" (551). Yet, Vivian is clear to note that "what is forgotten, however, does not disappear. Rather, the forgotten elements constitute 'resistances' or 'survivals' that confound any effort to make history a linear and univocal phenomenon" (551). Vivian continues that these resistances result in plural, competing interpretations of "history;" he writes, "Every interpretation, moreover, is shaped by its own historicity—that is, by the exigencies, conventions, and resistances of that time in which it is carried out" (551). Thus, Vivian's work provides a foundation to examine Burgos's poetry as acts of reconstructive resistance. However, while Vivian describes the discursive nature of history, arguing that histories are rhetorically constructed within and by the public (567), his work in this essay neglects the critical role the body plays in the rhetorical construction of histories.



In a 2014 review of critical rhetoric and race, Lisa Flores discusses the need for rhetorical scholarship which explores how “race, in all its messiness, ambiguity, and contestation, lies in/between discursivity and materiality in ways that are (almost) always embodied and lived” (94). Citing examples of continual public discourse of “raced” bodies within a superiority/inferiority binary, Flores argues that rhetorical scholars “must attend to such persistent discursive invocations of raced bodies and to the rhetorical iterations of racial embodiment” (95). Yet, even as we turn our attention to these invocations, Flores urges us to do so with careful nuance. She cautions scholars to not merely accept race as “real;” rather, we must account for the ways in which its “alleged ontological truth” continues to be read onto racialized bodies. It is within this maneuvering that Flores asks us to engage “the messiness, the slipperiness, the contradictoriness of race as discursive” (95). As Flores argues, this requires a turn to performance studies. Performance studies, unlike the work cited by Vivian, specifically explores “the corporeality of rhetoric and discursivity” (95). Citing the work of scholars like Bernadette Marie Calafell and E. Patrick Johnson, Flores notes that performance studies scholarship “not only centers bodies and embodiment, it does so in ways that tease apart and distinguish, that complicate and reveal. In these intricacies, performance studies scholars undo the realness of the raced body while they also claim and proclaim its possibilities” (95). Hinting at the intersectional nature of performance studies, Flores concludes by urging a greater focus on embodied performance for rhetorical scholars.

Yet, while Vivian theorizes the situatedness of discursive histories, and Flores advocates for an embodied understanding of race through the blending of rhetorical and

performance studies, it is within Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x<sup>2</sup> feminist performance scholarship where we find significant theorization of the body as a site of collective memory. Where some memory scholars like Aden et al. dismiss performance scholar Dwight Conquergood's move away from the traditional "text" in rhetorical constructions of memory (Aden et al. 326), rhetoricians who embrace performance studies adhere to Conquergood's thoughtful, political stance. Notably, in her theorization of performance studies, Chicana scholar Bernadette Calafell cites Conquergood's affirmation of performance as a way to engage audiences typically left out of traditional "textual" rhetorical studies. Of significance, Conquergood argues:

'For many people throughout the world, however, particularly subaltern groups, texts are often inaccessible, or threatening, charged with the regulatory powers of the state. More often than not, subordinate people experience texts and the bureaucracy of literacy as instruments of control and displacement' (qtd. in Calafell, *Theorizing Performance* 6-7).

In her own scholarship, Calafell works to bridge Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x identity politics "with theories of performance to reflect upon issues such as affect, community building, diaspora, popular culture, and sexuality" (6). To do this, Calafell adheres to Conquergood's argument that the traditional text is limited and privileged, and she borrows from Frederick Corey's conceptualization of the text as that which includes

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<sup>2</sup> Within this dissertation, I use both Chicana and Latina and Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x. While it is the current trend to use Chicanx and Latinx as all-encompassing terms, I am persuaded by critical scholars like E. Cassandra Dame-Griff who have argued that while the 'x' is meant to be inclusive of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals, the 'x' as universal "divests the term of its specificity for those individuals who use the term to represent their relationship to a gender binary that does not reflect their own personal identities and experiences" (2). Moreover, as I draw from many Chicana and Latina feminist scholars, I'd also like to pay tribute to their specific lived experiences. To that end, when referencing specific Chicana and Latina feminist scholarship, I work in those terms. When I am referencing broader populations, I use Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x.

“language, behavior, place, the body, and cultural landscape” (qtd. in *Theorizing Performance* 6). Moreover, Calafell connects her understanding of situated, vernacular texts with feminist of color theories of the flesh, and she amplifies personal, lived experiences in her work. She writes, “theories of the flesh privilege subjectivity and embodied knowledges as sites of fruitful theory building, giving women of color back the power to speak as authorities about their own experiences” (8).

In my own project, I argue that in constructing collective memories of Burgos’s embodied resistance to coloniality, this work must be situated within performative theories of the flesh. As Vivian notes, official narratives are frequently driven by the state (551). In other words, the constructed memory of a subject is a flattened version of a history that emphasizes the state’s agenda, a project which also simultaneously silences how the state’s imperial and colonialist power marks as Other those bodies that do not capitulate to hegemonic norms. By critically engaging theories of the flesh, or “embodied knowledges,” I can identify and illuminate these silences through Burgos’s, Rivera’s, Pérez Rosario’s, and Agüeros’s use of poetry, narrative, and autoethnography. Given my political commitments to a decolonial Chicana/Latina feminist perspective, I contend that this project also demands inherent understanding of the pervasiveness of coloniality in both framing Burgos’s body and voice as excess and silencing this excess in her memorialization. Here, it is important to note that coloniality of power influences how the colonized remember. As scholars like Emma Pérez argue, subaltern histories “tend to follow traditional history’s impulse to cover ‘with a thick layer of events,’ as Foucault writes, ‘the great silent, motionless bases’ that constitute the interstitial gaps, the unheard,

the unthought, the unspoken” (qtd. in Pérez 5). Yet, in drawing from Homi Bhabha’s reading of Foucault, Pérez argues that these gaps, or “silences, when heard, become the negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subject. It is in a sense where third space agency is articulated” (5). Citing Bhabha, Pérez notes that “it is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (qtd. in Pérez 5). Pérez then connects these discursive forces to Sandoval’s differential consciousness, arguing that it is also the “third space where I find the decolonizing subject negotiating new histories” (5).

Thus, within my dissertation, I regard Burgos and her historians as decolonizing subjects working through projects of negotiation. Burgos is negotiating her space as a poor, mixed-race, divorced woman, operating within a colonial structure that deems all of these positionalities as excessive. Burgos’s historians, regardless of title as historian, playwright, or translator, are negotiating the cultural myths and flattened state histories of Burgos to illuminate the “in-between spaces” of Burgos’s life, work, and contribution. Rivera, especially, engages her colonially constructed, embodied excesses as moments of departure from an official version of Julia de Burgos, the great Puerto Rican poet and heroine. Rather, these excesses serve as pathways into understanding not only the “messiness” of embodied resistance, but also the “messiness” involved in crafting collective histories and memories. By acknowledging and starting from a place of excess, these histories perform what Wanzer-Serrano calls “epistemic disobedience” in delinking from a more universal construct of history (650). By approaching a rhetorical study of Burgos through the fragmented lens of colonial excess, guided by the work of feminists

of color and decolonial scholars, I hope to produce a decolonial feminist project which disrupts public memory work searching for a universal “truth,” and moves toward a call for the study of embodied histories as a means of better understanding rhetorical and embodied resistance in the third space.

Within the remainder of this introduction, I build a methodological and theoretical foundation for my study of Burgos. I first outline how decolonization as an ethnical commitment informs my decolonial critique, highlighting its importance as an ideological and political commitment within rhetorical scholarship. I then outline my theoretical frameworks, citing relevant scholarship on public and collective memory, *testimonio*, and Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, and decolonial feminist theories. Following this discussion, I briefly outline my chapters and the ways in which they connect to forge my theoretical intervention in memory scholarship.

### **Decolonization as Methodology**

In a 2012 essay, Darrel Wanzer-Serrano critiqued Michael McGee’s unquestioning reliance on homogeneity. Given rhetoric’s disciplinary reliance on McGee as a methodological and theoretical embarkation, Wanzer-Serrano argues we must confront McGee’s inherent bias to “rethink rhetoric’s modus operandi and engage in some epistemic disobedience” (650). This disobedience is accomplished by delinking from the colonial narrative of universality. In terms of McGee and fragmentation, he begins by briefly outlining how historical homogeneity is a rhetorical construct. Wanzer-Serrano explains how people operating from the exterior of modernity have long had to construct a reality from fragments as means of survival. Finally, Wanzer-Serrano

advocates that all rhetoricians move toward a decolonial framework, noting early and late in the essay that decolonization is not merely relegated to political/economic projects, but rather, it functions as a way of rethinking/reknowing. Wanzer-Serrano draws from Nelson Maldonado-Torres as he asks us, as rhetoricians, to “listen to what has been silenced” (653), to struggle “‘against the structures of dehumanization’ and positively express ‘non-indifference toward the Other’” (653), and to revisit our discipline’s reliance on Continental philosophy, advocating instead for plural, localized knowledges (654). For Wanzer-Serrano and other decolonial scholars, to not embrace the decolonial option is to maintain a status quo that operates within a dehumanizing, “totalizing and exclusionary episteme” (654).

I argue that as scholars of color, we have no choice but to adopt a decolonial attitude, which “demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant” (Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being” 262). Therefore, in my study of Julia de Burgos’s life, work, and commemoration within the colonial constructs of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality in Puerto Rico, I use a decolonial methodology to inform my analysis. As scholars like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Emma Pérez, and Chela Sandoval note, the crux of modern/colonial “knowledge” is an insistence on a universal truth, a universal way of knowing, which ultimately equates a European “truth,” a Western way of knowing. Thus, working from Wanzer-Serrano’s critique of McGee and his call for epistemic disobedience, I situate my methodology and methods in the work of decolonization scholars and writers from a wide

variety of disciplines. However, while I draw from these scholars, my commitment is to decolonization as an ethical method, rather than to the scholars themselves. Aware of my positionality as a white-passing Chicana writing from within the disciplinary confines of a Western paradigm, I am careful to heed the advice of scholars Daniel C. Brouwer and Marie-Louise Paulese who address the politics of scholarship in counterpublic theory.

Cautioning instances of “conceptual neocolonialism,” Brouwer and Paulese argue against

presuming the fitness of one’s beloved or familiar theories and concepts for any sort of communication phenomena, when imagining the use of beloved or familiar theories and concepts as a gift to Others, or when forcing local data to take the shape of theories and concepts from elsewhere, theories and concepts that have particular histories and formations (75).

Rather, I seek to engage my project from a methodological commitment to understanding the fluidity of methods which spring from what Sandoval describes as a decolonial space of “differential consciousness.” Writing that “differential consciousness is described as the zero degree of meaning, counternarrative, utopia/no-place, the abyss, *amor en Aztlán*, soul” (Sandoval 139), Sandoval identifies this consciousness as one which occurs in many places and one which “inspires and depends on differential social movement and the methodology of the oppressed and its differential technologies, yet it functions outside of speech, outside academic criticism” (139). Drawing from Derridá, Sandoval notes, however, that this consciousness is constantly changing; she writes:

enactment of differential social movement—of the methodology of the oppressed—necessarily creates new modes of resistance, new questions and answers that supersede those that went before; for it is above all, a theory and a method of oppositional consciousness that belongs to no single population, no race, gender, sex, or class except for the subordinated who seek empowerment (152).

Critical to this oppositional consciousness is the middle voice, which functions to transform previous modes of resistance into “‘reflexive,’ differential forms” (156).

Working from the reflexive middle voice opens up the possibility for scholars and activists to dynamically perform a methodology wherein a

reflexive mode of consciousness self-consciously deploys subjectivity and calls up a new morality of form that intervenes in the social reality through deploying an action that re-creates the agent as the agent is creating the action—in an ongoing, chiasmic loop of transformation. The differential activist is thus made by the ideological intervention that she is also making: the only predictable final outcome is transformation itself. (Sandoval 156)

In my dissertation, I work from a methodological framework of differential consciousness toward a reflexive engagement with pluriversal methods. Yet, before I undertake this engagement, I find it important to outline decolonization as both theory and practice.

### **Decolonization**

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon writes that decolonization “implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation” (632). In his terms, decolonization is an “historical process” which requires that we confront coloniality and how it functions to “continue to fabricate the colonized subject” to profit off the colonial system (628-629). For Fanon, the ultimate goal of decolonization is the destruction of the colonial system wherein “‘the last shall be first’” (633), which essentially means that those who have been subjugated, dominated, and dehumanized by coloniality are liberated from “things” to humans. Fanon writes that this process requires a “new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity” (633).



Within this section, I examine how various scholars interpret this new language, though I emphasize here and elsewhere that decolonization always begins from an understanding of coloniality.

### **Coloniality**

Latin Americanist and comparative literature professor Nelson Maldonado-Torres provides an important distinction between coloniality and colonialism. Maldonado-Torres defines colonialism as a “political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire” (“Coloniality of Being” 243). Coloniality, however, requires “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limitations of colonial administrations” (243). Thus, coloniality allows the ideological dominance of colonialism to continue even after the political and legal ends of colonization. Aníbal Quijano notes that coloniality “is still the most general form of domination in the world today” (170). He argues that modern coloniality is the cornerstone of contemporary global power (170). Quijano argues that one of the reasons coloniality is still pervasive is the “colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it” (169). In other words, coloniality invades us at our innermost state. This invasive inculcation in coloniality is upheld through our daily participation in institutional systems, our cultural rituals, and our personal aspirations. Echoing Fanon, Quijano writes that this is due to the colonization of knowledge and meaning. Within his work, Quijano outlines how European colonizers crafted an

aspirational and “mystified image” of their knowledge (169). Maldonado-Torres notes how coloniality persists in all aspects of our lives, writing that “it is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self” (243). Ultimately, Maldonado-Torres argues, “as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday” (243).

Yet, while the ways in which coloniality specifically manifests within cultures are geographically localized, it makes some broad, global strokes. In moving toward an articulation of a decolonization methodology, these notions bear mentioning here. These moves are theorized as coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being. Theorized by Quijano, coloniality of power is the result of European colonization, as a mutation of previous instances of colonialism whereby dominant/inferior binaries were transformed into “a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior” (170). In essence, coloniality resulted in the economic and politic designation of “‘racial’ social classification” and “geocultural identities” to distribute labor globally (170). Building upon Quijano, Walter Mignolo describes how coloniality of power has operated in the Americas: “‘Indians’ and ‘blacks’ became two overarching categories that displaced and obscured the historical and ethnic diversity of people inhabiting the Americas and those transported from Africa to the Americas” (434). In the same way that coloniality of power systematically and completely pervades politics and economics with Eurocentric modernity, knowledge production is subject to the same influences. As described by Quijano above, “coloniality of knowledge” (in which European methods and theories are privileged, and indigenous knowledge is ignored or erased) was

accomplished by first restricting knowledge, and then presenting it as aspirational. Finally, building from Quijano's work on coloniality, Maldonado-Torres theorized the "coloniality of being" to articulate "the effects of coloniality in lived experience" ("Theses" 20). He describes how these elements of coloniality function together, creating "the line between the human and non-human" (20). These colonialities are the "epochal instantiation of the master/slave dialectic, with the exception that the structure is meant not to be dialectical. That is, in the modern/colonial world, the colonized are meant to perpetually condemned to the zone of damnation" (20). Adding a critical missing element to these coloniality constructs, philosopher Maria Lugones adds coloniality of gender to account for how gender formation is the result of intersectional oppressions of colonial heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification ("Heterosexualism" 187). Still, given the pervasiveness of coloniality is all aspects of "modern" society, how can we hope to overcome or deconstruct these inherent influences? In what follows, I briefly outline how scholars articulate decolonization before focusing on how Darrel Wanzer-Serrano crafts a decolonial rhetorical methodology.

### **Toward A Methodology**

Decolonial scholars engage a variety of ways to begin to disrupt or deconstruct coloniality. For instance, Ramon Grosfoguel advocates for a "radical universal decolonial anti-systemic diversity," which works to undo the Eurocentric abstract universal ("Colonial Thought" 31). Within this diversity, Grosfoguel pushes for three things: 1) a "decolonial epistemic perspective" that works beyond the Western canon; 2) "a universal decolonial perspective" which is the result of "critical dialogue between diverse critical

epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal” world; 3) decolonization of knowledge that seriously engages the “epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of Critical thinkers from the Global South thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies” (3). For Nelson Maldonado-Torres, decolonization is “confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the planet” (261). Concurring with Sandoval, Maldonado-Torres considers this move one of decoloniality, and he describes a “decolonial turn” wherein we are concerned with “making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the ‘invisible’ people themselves” (262). In his 2008 text *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, Maldonado-Torres articulates this turn as an ethics of love directed at humanizing invisible subjects.

Although Grosfoguel and Maldonado-Torres provide some guidelines for practicing decolonization, Darrel Wanzer-Serrano provides a practical example of this methodology in his book *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation*. Within this text, Wanzer-Serrano makes the case for a decolonial *rhetorical* method to examine how the Young Lords’ “enactment of differential consciousness pushes the boundaries of decolonial theory” (7). Engaging notions presented in decolonial scholarship, Wanzer-Serrano reads the Young Lords activism as “critical performances of border thinking, epistemic disobedience, and delinking” (7). As he approaches this project, Wanzer-

Serrano works through the practice of decolonial scholarship by acknowledging the coloniality/modernity paradigm and outlining divergent schools of decolonial thought. Citing a distinction between decolonialists Walter Mignolo, whom many critique for his seemingly total rejection of Western thought, and Enrique Dussel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who borrow from continental philosophy, Wanzer-Serrano establishes a position by stating his perspective on this debate is “one of epistemic privilege, rather than mere existence” (12). Wanzer-Serrano therefore performs a methodology of decoloniality within his scholarship by refusing to uphold the “epistemic privilege” of dominant methodologies (12). Rather, as he works to avoid “reproducing colonial violence” (13), he heeds the advice of Mignolo and Calafell to seek out methodologies that best engage his specific marginalized discourse (13). Wanzer-Serrano writes:

I am making a political and methodological choice to prioritize the Global South, to heed the calls of the disposed and work from within this particular epistemic location... Taking some other approach (e.g. radical democratic theory or identity performativity) and grafting it onto the Young Lords would be historically disingenuous, risk an unreflexive presentism, and do a kind of epistemic violence to their words and deeds by forcing them into modern/colonial forms of legibility. (13)

Yet, Wanzer-Serrano is clear to note that even as he makes this methodological choice, it is rooted less in “wholesale rejection” of “European modernity” than in a desire to refute its universalism. He writes that to reject “the West’s claim to epistemic privilege,” we must “better situate knowledge in its geographic and embodied specificity and resist attempts to universalize any particular episteme” (14). Noting that it is difficult to navigate between wholesale rejection or justificatory use of Western knowledge, Wanzer-

Serrano argues that this difficulty can be attributed to a lack of “rhetorical specificity” (15). Therefore, Wanzer-Serrano makes the claim that “de/colonial scholarship can benefit from a more rhetorical orientation that is highly attentive to practices of radical contextualization, sociohistorical contingency, and the situatedness of public discourses and activism” (15).

As I work to produce a decolonial rhetorical project, I pay particular attention to how Wanzer-Serrano frames decolonial rhetoric within this project. He defines rhetoric simply as the study of “situated public discourse” (15), though he elaborates on each of these terms in relationship to de/coloniality. In terms of “situatedness,” Wanzer-Serrano argues that methodologically it means 1) “one cannot separate out discourse from its imbricated contexts”; 2) “rhetoric should be understood as the contingent product of particular sociohistorical contexts” (16). This is a de/colonial construct of rhetoric as it requires both “an abandonment of abstract universals and ahistorical theorizing” and an embracing of “grounded theorizing that pays attention to the spatiotemporal and...embodied emergence of particular discourses in a ‘multiplicity of overlapping contexts’” (16). Regarding the “public,” Wanzer-Serrano specifies that within this project he views the public as the “real and/or imagined audience” to which situated discourses are addressed (17). He expands on his understanding of audience, noting “audiences are always imagined and discursively constituted—they are the complex and contingent product of sociohistorical contexts and are disclosed through rhetoric” (352-355). Citing Ronald Greene’s work on the constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity, Wanzer-Serrano argues that audiences have a “recursive relationship to rhetoric insofar as they

are both preconditions for rhetoric and themselves rhetorical products” (17-18). He is careful to note that this emphasis on audience does not foreclose traditional “private” discourse; rather, he argues that these discourses “help to radically contextualize public discourses in relation to different people, institutions, ideologies, and yet other discourses” (18). Finally, Wanzer-Serrano defines discourse as both verbal and also as the “material practices beyond the word [that] can and should be interrogated as discursive and (when situated and public) rhetorical acts” (19). For his particular context, he engages “speeches, newspaper articles, artwork, embodied performances, theatricality, photography, and more to constitute the material discursive practices of the Young Lords” (19). Wanzer-Serrano’s definition of rhetoric is one which embraces methodological fluidity and also creates a space to practice rhetoric within localized epistemological contexts. Moving forward, I utilize his definition of rhetoric as a decolonial framework for my dissertation.

As a method within this framework, Wanzer-Serrano draws from Mignolo’s concept of delinking, which he describes as resistive because it requires “disengaging from (though not operating completely outside of) the logic and rhetoric of modernity” (19-20). Wanzer-Serrano complicates the notion of delinking by reading it through theories of accent; citing scholarship on how discourse is appropriated through accent, Wanzer-Serrano concludes that whereas “knowledge and being are accented by coloniality,” “decoloniality is an alternative accent—one marked by pluriversal commitments, geo-historical attentiveness and bio-graphical configurations” (22). He approaches delinking as a process or method, and explains how delinking can be accomplished through

communicative and cultural strategies: “dis/articulation, exnomination, and disidentification” (23). In the interest of space, I will not expand on these terms here. Rather, I return to Wanzer as he explains why delinking is an important decolonial method:

Delinking, in this way, has to be understood as manifold: as both practice and perspective, as both a thing and a way. On one hand, it includes practices of dis/articulation, meta-ideologizing, disidentification, and so forth, that challenge the centrality of coloniality and its attendant forms of epistemic privilege to re-accent metaphorical and literal places with a decolonial tone. On another hand, delinking is a set of scholarly and activist perspectives, guided by an ethic of decolonial love, that reorient us toward hearing the voices of the Global South so that we might begin disrupting what we know and how we come to know those things, but not necessarily in ways that are accountable able or attempt to answer to the West. Rather, delinking seeks to enact a ‘preferential option for the condemned of the earth’ and calls for a ‘reactivation of subaltern knowledges’ that ‘transcends and transgresses the imposition of abstract universals while it opens up the path for dialogue among different epistemes.’ (27)

As Wanzer-Serrano moves through his text, he uses each chapter to identify different rhetorical moves made by the Young Lords. Yet, in line with his commitment to decoloniality, he clearly argues against mimicking these strategies, and instead advocates for understanding his decolonial project as a

rethinking of democracy rooted in decolonial heterogeneities that keeps open the terrain for political contestation, features commitments to racial and gender justice, is guided more by liberation than by recognition, and empowers people to be engaged political subjects who exhibit epistemic disobedience by delinking from coloniality and rejecting neoliberal hegemonies. (27)

Thus, given his emphasis on the decolonial turn for rhetoric, I argue that Wanzer-Serrano serves as an excellent model for rhetoricians, particularly because he is vigilant about not extrapolating his specific methods as universal constructs.



Drawing from Wanzer-Serrano's model, decolonization as a methodology opens up the possibilities for me to conduct a locally situated study that investigates the interstitial matrix of oppressions facing a woman like Julia de Burgos. Moreover, it helps me ethically formulate a theory of memory unrestricted by the state-driven forces undergirding what we commonly view as the "public." Therefore, in the next section, I explore scholarship on public memory, and I lay the foundation for the theoretical intervention of Latina and Chicana feminisms to enhance a decolonized theory of embodied, collective memory.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

As noted at the outset, my study requires an understanding in several veins of theory. Within this section, then, I examine relevant scholarship on theories of public memory, theories of *testimonio* as collective identity construction, and theories of Chicana, Latina, and decolonial feminisms to provide the groundwork for my study of Burgos as a resistive figure in collective memories of *puertorriqueñidad*. Because an exhaustive exploration of these literatures would be unwieldy, I have selected works I feel are both representative of these respective bodies of literature and pertinent for my study of Burgos.

#### **Public Memory**

Rhetorical critic Stephen H. Browne describes contested notions of public memory thusly: "public memory represents a cite of competition, of voices strategically or tactically claiming access to the past" (475). Therefore, in considering the different ways writers contest official histories of Julia de Burgos, I begin from a foundation of

rhetorical public memory scholarship. Kendall Phillips's edited collection *Framing Public Memory* serves as a useful starting place in this examination. Phillips introduces the collection by first engaging a traditional distinction between history and memory as "opposing ways of recalling the past" (2). Here, he notes old conceptions of history wherein it was described in terms of "accuracy and objectivity" and held as a "singular authentic account of the past" (2). In contrast, Phillips describes memory as "multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events" (2). Phillips explains the academic shift from this accepted binary as critics noted the problematic construct of an "authoritative history," and he marks this shift as the entrée of memory studies. Within his introduction, Phillips defines memory as "fluid and dynamic," and he draws from memory scholar Pierre Nora to describe a "living memory" whereby "societies are both constituted by their memories, and in their daily interactions, rituals, and exchanges, constitute these memories" (2). Phillips notes that within this mutual constitution, there is a space for contestation and revision, and these dynamic processes render memory a "highly rhetorical process" (2).

Contestation of public memories is critically important to my current project, particularly as I look at how silence and excess interact within marginalized peoples. Phillips writes that the study of public memory *can* allow us to explore this contestation of memory within publics and counterpublics, and that this contest reveals a "rhetorical struggle" (5). He states, "Within the broader horizons of remembrance and forgetting exist the dynamic relations of authority over public memories and the forces of resistance" (5). While I appreciate the possibilities embedded within Phillips's

understanding of public memory as potential resistance, its notions of “authority” are problematic as they still signal an end-goal of official state narrative. Phillips seems conscious of this as he exhorts public memory scholars to engage the relationship between three binaries: “remembrance/forgetting; authority/resistance; responsibility/absolution” (6). In outlining the chapters within the collection, Phillips reiterates how hegemonic forces work to stabilize the *appearance* of public memory (8), which for the purposes of my project serves as a useful foundation for understanding political motivations for crafting “official” narratives.

Although space does not allow me to engage each essay in *Framing Public Memory* here, Edward Casey’s discussion of types of memory is important for my future project. Casey begins by echoing the dynamic nature of memory; he writes, “public memory is both attached to a past (typically an originating event of some sort) and acts to ensure a future of further remembering of that same event” (17). This process, then, articulates a purposeful role in those who construct or craft memories. Casey continues by explaining four forms of human memory: individual memory, social memory, collective memory, and public memory (20). I am particularly interested in his definition of social memory, which he defines as “memory held in common by those who are affiliated either by kinship ties, by geographical proximity in neighborhoods, cities, and other regions, or by engagement in a common project” (22). Casey states that social memory is not necessarily “public,” noting family memories which function as intimate, private bonds. This clear delineation between public and private is a construct I hope to disrupt.

To help me in this goal, I purposefully engage public memory which explores public and collective memory by explicitly acknowledging the privileges, biases, and agendas within memory construction. For instance, in his discussion of vernacular memory, Aaron Hess argues that as critics, we should highlight the “points of contestation surrounding collective memory and its creation” (813). Moreover, he notes “the process of commemoration, simply by what is or is not commemorated, is inherently ideological in its formation” (813). Kendall Phillips echoes similar ideas in a more recent work discussing the failures of public memory. Highlighting the rhetorical function of memory, Phillips writes,

rhetoric, as an art of crafting public sentiment, becomes the primary actor in establishing these mechanisms of recollection in this process of caring for the representations of the past. Rhetorical appeals serve to frame memories within established cultural forms that, in turn, establish enthymematic connections (218).

Within this process, Phillips argues, these enthymematic “fixed forms” are then considered “necessary and ‘true’” (218). Thus, rhetorical memory construction works to elevate certain “histories” as authentic. Phillips writes that our work as rhetoricians, then, begins in “parsing” out from official histories the memories that “run counter to these forms of remembrance and against the grain of the processes of recollection” (221).

Marouf Hasian’s work in *Restorative Justice, Humanitarian Rhetorics, and Public Memories of Colonial Camp Culture* takes up this call of identifying bias, as he notes “both our rhetorical histories and our public memories of past misdeeds are often partial, selective, and motivated” (16). Moreover, Hasian’s work specifically focuses on colonial histories and memories, and he urges scholars to be “circumspect” in wading into the

“geopolitical wrangling” of memory work (18). Hasian is also interested in how memories of the past are coopted for agendas; he writes,

Our colonial histories and memories are made up of constitutive rhetorics, constellations of descriptive and symbolic meanings that contain fragments from many perspectival pasts that can be appropriated to suit the present needs of today’s advocates. (19)

Hasian cites Walter Benjamin to express the power and danger of memory as a tool in crafting histories (19). Yet, Hasian importantly engages the concept of social memory by noting how indigenous memories are preserved despite official “amnesiac practices” through “familial memory-work, commemorative rituals, the passing down of oral histories” (228). It is within these spaces of familial and everyday memory where I hope to situate my own project. To do this, I engage Latina/o scholarship on *testimonio* as a means of crafting collective, localized identity in spaces dictated by official narratives.

### ***Testimonio* as Collective Identity Construction**

In contrast to public memory discourse of official state narratives, scholars like Fernando Delgado call for us to examine the silences that surround marginalized subjects. Delgado situates his work in the vernacular, arguing that it offers a space to “uncover marginalized or subaltern expressions” (“Textualization” 420). Within a study on Latina/o identity, Delgado argues that marginalized populations can shift power dynamics between Eurocentric epistemologies and those that have been “Othered” is to begin to articulate their own “complex and polyvocal identity terms” (435). One of the ways in which these identity terms are established is through *testimonio*. In a later work, Delgado engages *testimonio* through his work on Rigoberta Menchú and collectivist

rhetoric. As a rejection of individualistic rhetoric, Delgado advocates that rhetoricians adopt an intercultural perspective which approaches testimony as a form of collective rhetoric. He writes, “in the collective frame, ingroupness, community, and interdependence are organizing cultural concepts that structure communication and discourse” (“Testimonial Discourse” 19), and he argues that testimonials frequently function as a rhetorical and political expression of this community. Specifically, Delgado claims that testimonials articulate “an authentic narrative from a witness representing collective experience that challenges official or state narratives” (20). While Delgado runs the risk of privileging a different type of “authenticity”, he argues that the testimony of witnesses like Menchú to state violence is critical in combatting the official narratives where these incidents would be otherwise erased. Moreover, Delgado argues that investigating testimony is imperative when researching collectivist cultures. He contends that the only way for rhetoricians in an “outsider position” to ethically engage with discourses like Menchú’s narrative is to recognize the need to explore theories and methods that work in different cultural frames (26). Finally, Delgado encourages us to focus on “cultural dimensions of a discourse or object rather than on the validity or universality of our favored theory or method” (26).

Roberto Avant-Mier and Marouf Hasian observe this call in their own examination of Menchú and *testimonio*. They describe *testimonio* as a unique Latin American discursive strategy that stands outside Western scholarship looking for “universal truths about the past or the present” (331). Both Delgado’s work and Avant-Mier and Hasian’s study perform decolonial functions as they explore the possibilities of *testimonio* for disrupting

binaries. Given its fragmentary nature, *testimonio* allows users to operate from peripheral positionalities while also crossing “a variety of borders, both literally and figuratively” (331). As Avant-Mier and Hasian note, *testimonio* is a communal form of discourse that allows marginalized groups to articulate their own histories and create their own spaces for “oppositional argument” (332). They cite Dieguez’s claim that *testimonio* is a rhetorical strategy that allows for ““a subversion of the ideologies of discovery, conquest, and colonization”” (qtd. in Avant-Mier and Hasian 332). Moreover, they claim that *testimonio* operates in a vernacular space to craft collective histories outside of “neocolonialist ideologies” (qtd. in Avant-Mier and Hassian 333). Citing the debate over Menchú’s veracity in the wake of Western anthropological critiques, they argue that these questions are inherently questions of epistemological privilege and “knowledge production” (338). Significantly, Avant-Mier and Hasian conclude by noting that gender is inherently connected to debates over *testimonio* as a legitimate rhetorical form of memory construction.

Michelle Holling takes up this discussion of gender in her 2014 study on *feminicidio testimonio*. She defines *testimonio* as ““told in the first person by a narrator who is a real protagonist or witness of events’ to unsheathe violations and wrongs” (314). Holling, too, describes *testimonio* as distinctively Latin American, and she states that it began as “a way for subalterns to resist imperialism and colonialism and to document social-political-cultural histories that are often inflected with human rights violations” (316). Holling situates *testimonio* within communication studies, noting it “illustrates a rhetorical and political form of discourse that operates from a collective voice through which cultural

dimensions modify the presentation of political content” (316). For Holling, *testimonio* takes on transformative dimension for the listener. Citing a particularly gendered example of the Juarez feminicides, Holling argues that the *feminicidio testimonio* “works to transform listeners to witnesses by (en)gendering a relationship between them and the narrator” (314). To achieve this transformation, Holling states that “scenes play an important role in beginning listeners’ transformation to witnesses by orienting them to situational factors that deepen their understanding of feminicides” (319). Integral in this scene is the inclusion of violence as it requires the listener as witness to engage their embodied positionality and to “speculate on suffering that results from socioeconomic disparities or toxic fallout” (319).

Holling also notes that space is also critical in the transformation to witness. Citing her particular case study, Holling states Alma gives her *testimonio* in a “homespace that serves as a ‘site of resistance and liberation struggle’” (319). This space, Holling argues, “(en)genders a constructed family or a sense of kinship that further advances the listeners-to-witnesses transformation” (319). Constructing witnesses through listeners is a significant part of the *feminicidio testimonio* because it allows the *testimonio* to move beyond “the gendered space in which it was delivered...and enters into alternate spaces (e.g., the classroom or an academic journals)” (322). This inclusion of gender within subaltern memory construction is a critical intervention, and it is one which draws from the work of Chicana, Latina, and decolonial feminist theories. Thus, in the next subsection, I identify scholarship that informs how I theorize my interactions with both Burgos’s work as well as the collective scholarship on her life.



## **Foundations of Chicana, Latina, and Decolonial Feminist Theories**

Inherent in Chicana and Latina feminist political commitments of resistance, deconstructing binaries, and coalition building is an emphasis on constructing or crafting a distinct collective identity. While this identity does not function to subsume the individual lived experiences of Chicanas and Latinas, it serves as a space from which Chicana and Latina feminists can begin to theorize themselves in a “third space,” or what Chela Sandoval describes as a U.S. third world feminist social movement theory (70).

Sandoval argues:

It is this personal, political, and cultural configuration that permitted feminists of color from very different racial, ethnic, physical, national, or sexual identities access to the same psychic domain, where they recognized one another as ‘countrywomen’ of a new kind of global and public domain, and as a result generated a new kind of coalition identity politics, a ‘coalitional consciousness,’ if you will. (70)

This coalitional identity, for Chicana feminists in particular, has its roots in Gloria Anzaldúa’s work. Anzaldúa theorizes the new *Mestiza* as a collective identity that disrupts the binary of Anglo and Mexican through a process in which “the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness” (80). Anzaldúa continues, “the work of the *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (80). Cherríe Moraga expands on the significance of theories of the flesh, writing “theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete where we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). Theory in the flesh, then, is one which requires

“bridging” contradictions (23). This is especially true for Latinas in the United States, whose identities are marked by what Angharad Valdivia describes as radical hybridity (6). Valdivia argues that the “Latina body as a floating signifier represents the identity crisis of a nation forced to acknowledge its heterogeneity, hybridity, and continued racism” (16). Thus, in working to bridge these embodied contradictory identities, Moraga advocates for “naming our selves and by telling our own stories” (23). She concludes that Chicana and Latina feminists who theorize from the flesh use “flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our ‘wounded knee’” (23).

Norma Alarcón echoes Sandoval and Moraga as she revisits the idea that women of color feminism springs from a desire to “construct our own epistemologies and ontologies to make claims to our own critical theory” (354). At the root of this desire is what she calls “inscription in a different register;” in this instance, self-inscriptions by women of color (354). Alarcón argues that such self-inscriptions “as focal point of cultural consciousness and social change, weave into language the complex relations of a subject caught in the contradictory dilemmas of race, gender, ethnicity, sexualities, and class, transition between orality and literacy” (354-355). In theoretical terms, the desire for Chicana and Latina feminists to participate in this self-inscription is related to their “absence or displacement in the theoretical production and positions taken by Euroamerican feminists and African Americanists” (355). Moreover, it is also a quest for these feminists to resist “nonrevised” theoretical models that reify the dominance of cultural, national, and cognitive dislocations (355). How, then, do Chicana/o/x and

Latina/o/x feminist rhetoricians theorize this identity construction in ways that account for a third space, one cognizant of, but not dictated by violent binaries of dominance?

Lisa Flores engages this disruption of binaries in her examination of how Chicana feminists use discourse to create space and home for themselves by deploying a rhetoric of difference. This rhetoric of difference echoes a positionality that is outside the realm of both Anglo and Mexican identity (143). Flores engages the border and its discursive relationship to identity as presented in feminist texts about the borderland. Flores argues that these challenges associated with occupying the borderland have rhetorical implications for Chicana feminists; specifically, she identifies how Chicana feminists' multiple identities have resulted in rhetorical styles "allowing them to maintain multiple allegiances as they proclaim self-named identity" (145). This is accomplished through both the "interactive nature of the relationship between form and content," and "the need to fuse public and private" (145). Flores explains that these allegiances coalesce in a rhetoric of difference. She theorizes a rhetoric of difference as that which "includes repudiating mainstream discourse and espousing self- and group-created discourse" (145). Flores argues that this is critical in allowing marginalized groups to define themselves outside of stereotypes and dominant cultures; moreover, she notes that this move outside of dominant culture also grants marginalized communities autonomy (145-146). She discusses the importance of naming as a critical link to a unique identity that creates "feelings of pride and solidarity" through "the rejection of dominant definitions and the affirmation of self identity" (146).

Flores pays particular attention to the structure of a rhetoric of difference within Chicana feminist discourse. She outlines this structure in three stages:

They begin by merely carving out a space within which they can find their own voice. After establishing this space, they begin to turn it into a home where connections to those families are made strong. Finally, recognizing their still existing connections to various other groups, Chicana feminists construct bridges or pathways connecting them with others (146).

Flores argues that constructing this space allows Chicana feminists to reject their marginal identity and center themselves. Flores expands this idea of space to explain how Chicana feminist discourse works to produce a homeland. For Flores, this transformation of space into home is necessary because Chicana feminists are too often “outsiders” (149). Flores describes the Chicana feminist homeland as one which “reflects the diversity and multiplicity” of Chicana feminists; reflects Chicano heritage through “affirmation of mothers and mother figures”; and “allows for the creation of a sisterhood among women that restores a feeling of family and that is woman affirming” (150). This homeland is a space where the Chicana feels peace, comfort, and self-love (151). Flores concludes by examining how this discursively created homeland can work to create alliances based on bridge building that both honors the autonomy of Chicana feminist identities and also works to break down borders through a celebration of difference.

Bernadette Calafell also theorizes identity construction in the third space from the realm of performance. In a review of feminist scholarship, Calafell calls for us to incorporate “intersectional reflexivity,” and she argues that we must learn to “theorize from an Other perspective” (“Politics of Inclusion” 268). Citing Gust Yep, Calafell argues this theorization must begin in “thick intersectionalities” which “attend to the

lived experiences and biographies of the persons occupying a particular intersection including how they inhabit and make sense of their own bodies” (qtd. in “Politics of Inclusion,” 268). Calafell models this commitment to performative intersectionality in an earlier work as she investigates her own Chicana identity in a pilgrimage to Mexico City. “Working through” the legend of Malintzin Tenépal and against the dichotomy of whore/virgin, Calafell theorizes “performative process or pilgrimage as a means of honoring identities in the making and alternative forms of advocacy” (“Pro(re-)claiming Loss” 54). She also argues, “affect created through performances of queer temporality calls preexisting subjects into spaces of identification where lived experience is altered and potentialities are opened as identity continues to be in the making” (54). Within the text, Calafell uses autoethnographic narrative to theorize performative identity. She engages erasure, both historical and personal, and she also demonstrates a *mestiza* consciousness as she acknowledges her own role in erasure. Calafell then connects this erasure to herself: “I come to you now because, honestly, I see that you and I are in the same boat. We have both lost our voices” (47). This sense of loss (voice, identity) is thematic within the piece. Citing other Chicana feminist scholars who have sought to reclaim Malintzin, Calafell describes how Malintzin’s historical branding as whore within the dichotomy has tainted the identity of all Chicanas (47). Embedded within this performance is the significance of narrative in shaping identity. Calafell tells Malintzin,

you need self-definition right now just as much as I do. I am hoping in my journey towards you, I will also find my voice and perhaps this pilgrimage, this performance in which I engage can add to a Chicana feminist project of bringing your narrative to life because it is so embodied, because it is so performed (47).

For Calafell, externally framed cultural narratives work to discipline Chicanas by dictating “the proper roles of women” and stripping women of their voices (47). Thus, she advocates for self-definition as a means to combat the “monster of history,” “the force of narratives, official narrative through we have always been defined” (51). Calafell illustrates the possibility for Chicanas when they perform outside of the official narrative as she confronts the physical, though unofficial “sacred site” of Malintzin. Absent of official sanctions, Calafell and the reader realize that the historical narrative of Malintzin is forced. This realization allows for a moment of reconciliation and possibility (52). Calafell writes, “The possibility of remaking in the performance of language and in this the embodiment of history can be liberatory and intoxicating as it is the ultimate seduction” (52). Working from J. Robert Cox’s scholarship on memory as the liberatory “potential to subvert one-dimensional consciousness and also prefigure an alternative future” (qtd. in “Pro(re-) Claiming Loss” 53), Calafell ultimately advances a theory of possibility for Chicana feminist identity construction through performance as she disrupts official narratives of Chicana identity.

In Flores’s and Calafell’s work, we see that how we frame our history and narratives impacts our ability to achieve a third space of consciousness. Yet, entering this third space, in terms of Burgos, requires a complete disengagement from Eurocentric entanglements, including what we might commonly understand as our participation and adherence to public memory. To accomplish this, then, feminist scholars of color must turn to theories of decolonial feminism. Inherent in these theories are attention to situated and localized vernacular, faithful witnessing, and the creation of collective memory.

Michelle Holling and Bernadette Calafell engage decolonization through vernacular discourse and performance. In their 2011 edited book on Latin@ vernacular discourse (LVD), Holling and Calafell describe LVD as that

which concerns public discourse in visual, verbal, written, or performative forms produced from within Latin@ communities, and advances epistemological claims about embodied acts of identity and culture, rhetorical struggles over identity construction, community formation and strategies of resistance (“Latin@ Vernaculars” 17-18).

They advance the idea of LVD as a “metatheory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latin@s struggle over, produce, engage, enact, and/or perform culture, identities and community formation” (20). Essential to practicing this LVD metatheory, Holling and Calafell argue that the critic must discern three characteristics: “namely, tensions of identity, a decolonial aim, and the critic/al role” (21). Of particular interest in this discussion is the relationship between decolonization and the body as “a site of resistance and possibility for agency, revision, and community building” (23). Holling and Calafell advocate for a “turn to the theoretical lens and method of performance to study Latin@ vernacular discourses” (26). Performance is particularly important for Holling and Calafell in these contexts because of its “emancipatory” possibilities (“ChicanoBrujo Performance” 61). Holling and Calafell draw from Conquergood to note that performance “empowers historically marginalized discourses and identities through a politics of embodiment and visual imagery” (61). Moreover, they argue that much of this performance occurs in the everyday, and they connect cultural performance with “personal and social identities” (61). Advancing the work of scholars like Emma Pérez and Anzaldúa, Holling and Calafell describe decolonial performance as one which

“performs, embodies, and manifests the ills of colonialism experienced by Chicana/os using the performer’s body as a site of identification and exorcism for multiple audiences” (78). Central to Holling and Calafell’s decolonial theorization is the body and its presence of performative excess. Given my claims about Burgos as an embodied figure of resistance, these resources offer a fruitful foundation for this investigation. Yet, in approaching my study, I am mindful of my own entanglements.

### **Toward a Decolonial Feminist Method**

To account for these entanglements, I draw from Yomaira Figueroa’s work on faithful witnessing as “a useful method through which to analyze these texts and to read resistance in postcolonial and decolonial narratives” (642). Drawing from Maria Lugones, Figueroa describes faithful witnessing “as a method of collaborating with those who are silenced. Lugones’s philosophical concept of ‘faithful witnessing’ is both a political act and a feminist philosophical approach that aligns itself with women of color and decolonial epistemologies” (642). Figueroa provides greater context for “faithful witnessing,” highlighting its necessity in a colonized society. Citing Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Figueroa describes witnessing as both a way to give/demand recognition, and a way in which “indigenous peoples can ‘make claims and assertions about rights and dues’” (642). Figueroa expands on faithful witnessing as a decolonial feminist tool, which “makes visible the often unseen consequences of the colonality of power, knowledge and gender” (642). Further, echoing other calls for decolonized methods, Figueroa states,



Faithful witnessing challenges singular narratives or dominant perspectives and in doing so takes one away from singular interpretations of truth, knowledge, and rights and toward a polysensical approach: one that understands that there are many worlds, that sees/reads many perspectives, particularly the perspectives of those who are dehumanized or rendered invisible. (643)

Figueroa adopts a “decolonial attitude” in her own use of faithful witnessing, stating that this attitude allows her to “take seriously the work of fiction produced by ‘postcolonial’ peoples and read these works against the grain of power toward a decolonial praxis” (645). Figueroa’s application of this attitude allows her to undercut familiar colonial tropes and bear witness to moments of disidentification and to the ways in which coloniality enacts violence upon bodies outside of recognition. Figueroa argues, “faithful witnessing is an act against oppression on the side of resistance, an act that though dangerous, can build coalitions between oppressed peoples and validate nondominant truths and experiences” (652). She goes on to state that scholars should use faithful witnessing as a reading practice “to see dehumanizing colonial violence” as well as “acts of resistance” to such violence (652). Finally, Figueroa urges us to employ a decolonial attitude while reading, arguing that it is imperative to have faithful witnesses to history after 1492 “because the present and the past demand redemption from the imperial colonial project of the past five centuries” (653). Embedded in Figueroa’s work, especially, is the dual nature of performance that occurs during witnessing. The rhetoric itself is a type of performance, but through the act of faithful witnessing, we also perform as scholars.

Ruth Trinidad Galván’s work expands on how this dual performance allows us to more effectively engage collective memory. Galván begins from a theoretical framework

of Chicana/transborder cultural studies. She states this allows her to read selected texts as “a form of protest literature directed to both men and women” (344). Galván explores collective memory within several Chicana writers’ works on the Juarez feminicides to explore “a colonial legacy of rape and female subjugation” (348). Within this discussion, she explores epistemologies of brown bodies. By juxtaposing these epistemologies against normative, justificatory narratives of the violent risks associated with the lifestyles and bodies of poor Mexican women, Galván argues that “underscoring the collective memory of colonization and oppression at the center of Chicana and Mexicana feminist ontologies is about decentering dominant epistemologies and foregrounding the knowledge the female brown body possesses” (348). For Galván, a decolonial project is one which must address both epistemologies and ontologies, and she argues that “a focus on collective memory requires a public pedagogy where teaching and learning is politicised and communities participate and bear witness to the process in an open space” (353). Galván concludes by advocating for public projects as a means to fully engage misogynist ideologies and violence, and she notes that combatting these issues is a full undertaking that requires participants understand a worldview situated in “oppression, colonization, rape, racism, and sexism” (354).

Thus, in building from connections between performance and collective memory, Figueroa and Galván provide ways to understand how bodies from the margins operate in Sandoval’s “third space,” ignored or absent from dominant binaries. Yet, this work, and broader decolonization scholarship, can be more richly understood by turning to José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of disidentification. In considering both how we engage and

understand colonized subjects, Muñoz urges us to consider how disidentification presents strategies for “cultural, material and psychic survival” for the colonized person (161).

Where coloniality accounts for a matrix of oppressions, disidentification offers a framework for how the colonized engage these oppressions. Muñoz writes that disidentification is

a response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation. These routinized protocols of subjugation are brutal and painful. Disidentification is about managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence. (161)

Although Muñoz constructs disidentification as a survival mechanism, he is quick to note how it “offers a system of volitional and semivolitional gestures whose ethos, while always survivalist, is also critical” (168). Disidentification, then, is a dynamic process, but Muñoz cautions that its “use-value is only accessible through the transformative politics that it enables subjects and groups to imagine” (179). Thus, Muñoz’s theory of disidentification is a crucial element in examining how Burgos constructs a history and future for Puerto Rico, along with how her history is constructed through a social, collective engagement with her perceived excesses.

### **Chapter Outline**

Building from a decolonial feminist rhetorical methodology, and theoretically grounded in Chicana and Latina feminisms, my dissertation examines how Burgos and her historians negotiate memory to confront and disrupt colonial violence and erasure. By reading Burgos’s and Rivera’s projects against the imperialistic narrative of the USPS, I argue Burgos and Rivera, through embodied resistance and faithful witnessing,

demonstrate how decolonial memory projects can rebut overriding hegemonic narratives while also connecting their communities in negotiated third spaces.

My dissertation proceeds in the next five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides historical context on the ways in which colonization and colonialism have wrought sustained and continued violence against Puerto Ricans, with particular emphasis on Puerto Rican women. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the ways in which colonial and imperial powers have sought to control, oppress, and erase the bodies of women like Julia de Burgos. In Chapter 3, I examine how this erasure continues through state-sponsored public memory narratives. I specifically examine how the richly crafted resistance of Burgos is flattened within the “official” narrative of Burgos articulated by the United States Postal Service. Reading the USPS narrative against Burgos’s own poetic narrative of the violence of US imperialism, I illustrate how the process of colonialism works to preserve a flat, universal narrative through state-sponsored circulation. Within this chapter, I use extratextual methods to critique how public memory projects promote middlebrow multiculturalism as a means of maintaining a neoliberal hegemony. Here, I also argue that much of the memory work rhetoricians engage privileges and perpetuates projects like that of the USPS.

In Chapter 4, I analyze how Julia de Burgos uses poetry as a form of resistive writing to combat the continued influence of Spanish colonialism in the nostalgic *treintista* vision of Puerto Rican nationalism. Drawing from critical scholarship on Burgos, I examine how Burgos wields critical auto-representation through an “I” persona in her poetry as she confronts the heteropatriarchal silencing of women in the space of a dual colonialism.

From this persona, Burgos creates a decolonial imaginary of possibility by dismantling the thrall of nostalgia; Burgos works through her body to build (new) memory. To inform this analysis, I use the complete compilation of Burgos's poetry in Jack Agüeros's English translation *Song of Simple Truth* as my primary source in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, I offer an alternative to typical public memory work as I examine how Carmen Rivera performs faithful witnessing by privileging performance as memory in her staged play *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water*. Because the play has finished its run, I am unable to view the performance live. Thus, I analyze it as performed on video, acknowledging that the recording is an archived performance and that something is lost in the process (Taylor 20). Still, Rivera's play offers an opportunity to fully engage the juxtaposition of excess and expectation in "A Julia de Burgos," the poem mentioned at the outset of this introduction. Rivera also plays with Burgos's theorization of embodiment as she creates "I" (as the character "Woman") and Julia as distinct characters. Along with this embodied performance, Rivera also articulates a notion of memory as an illusory, collective exercise. I contextualize my analysis through the work of other Burgos memory projects, namely Vanessa Pérez Rosario's intersectional history *Becoming Julia de Burgos: The Making of a Puerto Rican Icon*. I conclude this chapter by returning to notions of identity, memory, and a collective notion of *puertorriqueñidad* as constituted through memory projects of and by Julia de Burgos. This section draws from each of the chapters and culminates in a discussion of how embodied memory allows individuals to articulate and perform *puertorriqueñidad*, what Andrew Stehney Vargas describes as the essence of an identity that is the result of "our status as colonial

subjects severed abruptly from our traditional culture by violent historical processes, left to pick up its tattered remains and reassemble them” (“Puertorriqueñidad”).

I conclude my dissertation with a brief coda in which I reflect upon my own identity within rhetorical studies. Here, I trace the process of researching the dissertation, and I outline how traditional notions of public memory studies do not possess the vocabulary for an adequate, ethical, contextually situated interrogation of subjects like Julia de Burgos. Thus, in drawing from the knowledge and example of Latina/o rhetoricians before me, I conclude with a statement of my own commitments and a call to recalibrate rhetorical studies for all voices.

## Chapter 2: Colonialism, Imperialism, and Discipline at the Intersection

At the end of 2017, the journal *Small Axe* devoted substantial space to a discussion of Julia de Burgos as well as scholar Vanessa Pérez-Rosario's work concerning Burgos's influence on the island of Puerto Rico and in New York City. In one of the essays, entitled "Rediscovering Julia de Burgos: The People's Rebel Soul Poet," Edna Acosta-Belén provides an intersectional snapshot of Burgos, exploring how Burgos deployed her body and her work to resist US imperialism and the continued colonization of Puerto Rico. Interestingly, Acosta-Belén describes Pérez-Rosario's contribution to the rediscovery of Burgos as one which "sheds further light on her creative imagination and of her *being* Julia de Burgos" (189). The emphasis on *being* is important as it implies a performative embodiment, and in Burgos's case, the embodiment of resistance. In describing Burgos, Acosta-Belén identifies her as a "transgressor" and a "subversive" against patriarchal colonial norms (190). Acosta-Belén outlines Burgos's background in Puerto Rico:

In a countryside overwhelmed by poverty and the struggles for daily survival, Burgos also faced the constraints of being a woman of mixed race in the patriarchal Puerto Rican Society of the early twentieth century. Adding to these factors were her fraught locations as a colonial citizen of Puerto Rico, and later on, a colonial migrant to the New York metropolis, and the different landscapes of transnationality and simultaneous embeddedness that connect Burgos to her different island and stateside settings and identities. (191)

Within this description, we not only gain understanding of Burgos's intersecting positionalities, but also a sense of the significant role that colonialism played in shaping her identity, and in turn, her legacy of resistance. In describing the role of migration and displacement in advancing the nationalist Puerto Rican movement,

Acosta-Belén argues:

these colonial US citizens of Puerto Rico became exiles, seeking to escape the repressive political environment on the island, but were able to continue clamoring for its independence and asserting their sense of Puerto Ricanness more freely than their fellow compatriots back on the island (191).

Acosta-Belén is one of many scholars who explores Burgos through a lens of colonialism. Thus, any project which analyzes Julia de Burgos's life and writing as resistive, decolonial performance must begin with a clear understanding of continued coloniality and U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico. Specifically, such a project should articulate how coloniality has worked to construct a patriarchal society that shapes national notions of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Indeed, understanding coloniality in these ways is an epistemological imperative. As Acosta-Belén notes, Burgos's Puerto Rican feminist successors worked through "consciousness-raising" projects related to

colonialism and the power relations and prevailing social, racial, and gender inequalities that impinged on all third-world societies and people of color [which] also led to a more sustained critical examination of the relationships between power and the construction of knowledge. (199)

Within this chapter, then, I work to stay within that tradition as I present a brief history of coloniality and its overpowering influence on Puerto Rican lands, people, and identities.

As I proceed through this history, I begin with definitional work by examining distinctions between common terms in colonialism research. I then briefly examine



Spanish colonial rule and its emphasis on racial, classed hierarchies. I next move to a discussion of colonization through the transitional period following the Spanish-American war, wherein the US took possession of Puerto Rico. Arguing along with scholars like Alice E. Colón Warren that the impacts of colonization on intersectional identities accelerated during this period (665), I devote significant space to outlining how continued colonization under the US imperialist project both shaped and restricted gender and sexuality in Puerto Rico. Finally, I provide a specific look at the interwar period, specifically the 1930s, to understand how women like Burgos were frequently reduced to their race, class, and gender. By building from this foundation, I am better able to examine how colonization created and sustained hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class for Puerto Ricans, like Burgos, both on the Island and in the United States.

### **Defining Terms**

In the inaugural issue of *Settler Colonial Studies*, Lorenzo Veracini explains the important distinctions between colonialism and settler colonialism. He argues that they are fundamentally different projects. *Colonialism*, according to Veracini, is “primarily defined by exogenous domination. It thus has two fundamental and necessary components: an original displacement and unequal relations” (1). In traditional colonialism, colonizers make their superiority apparent. Citing Albert Memmi, Veracini notes the traditional relationship between the colonizer and colonized: the colonizer always knows that “‘the most favored colonized will never be anything but colonized people’ and that ‘certain rights will forever be refused them’” (qtd. in Veracini 2). Moreover, Veracini argues that within traditional colonialism this superiority is explicitly

preserved, as in the case of slavery. Preserving the history of the colonial encounter is also critical in colonialism because the narrative of the encounter helps to overtly solidify the superiority of the colonizer and perpetually postpone the “freedom and equality” of the colonized (3). In contrast, the settler colonialist operates from a space of erasure. Within settler colonialism, the colonizers form a space of “non-encounter” so as to “disavow the presence of indigenous ‘others’” (2). Given the consuming sense of settler colonialist ownership, as outlined by Tuck and Yang, this form of colonialism requires an “extinguishing” of any previous claims. As Veracini states,

The successful settler colonies ‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity...Settler colonialism thus covers its tracks and operates towards its self-supersession. (3)

Yet, while settler colonialism is the most prevalent form of colonialism that I encounter in my study of Burgos, there are distinct remnants of traditional colonialism as well.

For leading decolonization scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, precise language is critical in performing and writing about decolonization. Thus, in their 2012 essay, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang provide clear definitional parameters of the most pervasive type of colonialism I engage in this project: settler colonialism. Essential to any colonialist project is the presence of either external colonialism or internal colonialism. According to Tuck and Yang, *external colonialism* “denotes the expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them to—and build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of—the colonizers, who get marked as the first world” (4). External

colonialism best exemplifies how we have come to consider the colonization of the Americas in that the Spanish, British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese used naval/military might to extract natural resources and, in Tuck and Yang's terms, participated in a system in which "all things Native become recast as 'natural resources'—bodies and earth for war, bodies and earth for chattel" (4) *Internal colonialism*, on the other hand, is related to "biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation" (4). Thus, in contrast to extraction, internal colonization works through systemic "modes of control," such as policing, prisons, education, minoritizing, "to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite" (5). For Tuck and Yang, internal colonization is a totalizing effort to "authorize the metropole," wherein "strategies of internal colonialism, such as segregation, divestment, surveillance, and criminalization, are both structural and interpersonal" (5).

As I will describe below, Spanish colonization of Puerto Rico initially operated as a project of external colonialism, but as Spain sought to build its empire, and the US eventually won out in the battle for expansionist imperialism and gained control of Puerto Rico, external colonialism and internal colonialism blended to create and uphold a system of *settler colonialism*. Tuck and Yang account for this hybridity in settler colonialism because "there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony" (5). Settler colonialism has been the model deployed within the borders of the United States since its initial colonization; rather than incremental or military extraction, the colonizers of what is now known as the United States opted for "a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments" (5).

Furthermore, in distinguishing settler colonialism from other modes of colonialism, Tuck and Yang emphasize the insistence of making a home on Indigenous land by declaring sovereignty over the land. As they note, land (to include water, air, subterranean earth) is of the utmost value in the settler colonialist context:

Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporarily contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of the occupation. This is why Patrick Wolfe (1999) emphasizes that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event. In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. (5)

Tuck and Yang explain that settler colonialists begin their project by first physically destroying Indigenous peoples and then devastating cultures and identity further through law and policy (6). It is a project of total erasure and subjugation. Moreover, it is also important to note that settler colonialism thrives on the subjugation of slaves. Inherent in the chattel slave construct is a disembodied notion of labor from the person of the slave; as Tuck and Yang note, the “slave’s person is the excess” and it is expendable, whereas the slave’s labor is not. Ultimately both the subjugation of the Indigenous inhabitant and the chattel slave work to position the settler as “both superior and normal; the settler is natural” (6). Thus, the settler colonialist is never an immigrant; where colonizers relocated to Puerto Rico, they were seen as rightful inhabitants. Conversely, Puerto Ricans who migrated to the US in the diaspora retained racialized markings of external colonial displacement and internal minoritization.

A final term within my project that requires a clear definition is imperialism. Much of the scholarship I have encountered distinguishes between imperialism and colonialism. However, I approach the two terms as interrelated, all-consuming projects. For my definition, I turn to Adam J. Barker's work on the hybrid, globalized colonial state. Barker draws from Hardt and Negri to describe "contemporary empires as the overlapping and interconnected spheres of influence around states, supranational organizations, and corporations, especially those corporations classified as multinational" (330-331). Within a "global" sphere, Barker argues that the "empire is decentered and deterritorializing, and because of the lack of meaningful borders imperial rule essentially has no limits" (331). Contemporary imperialism works to erase its history, similar to settler colonialism. Barker writes "it 'suspends history,' portrayed as the natural order, equally applicable anywhere on the globe, implying an 'end of history' where in a natural homogenous order overcomes chaotic difference and is established for eternity" (331). *Imperialism* in this context, then, functions as a deliberately ahistoric, essential system of order; moreover, imperialism works to legitimize a "centralized creation of norms" (331). Imperialism also operates within a paternalistic hierarchy, where the empire has the "the right to intervene in the social life of citizens under the guise of protecting them" (331). As explained below, in terms of US turn-of-the-century imperialism in Puerto Rico, this normalization and protective stance allows for the colonizing nation to strip the inhabitants of the colonized nation of their rights until they are deemed "fit." However, as we see in each of the definitions above, this "right" time of self-sufficiency is either nonexistent or perpetually postponed.

## **Spanish Colonial Rule in Puerto Rico**

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, an understanding of the material and social impacts of colonization is critical in projects which engage the work and life of the colonized. As a site of study, Puerto Rico in particular requires a thorough review of the history of colonization. Alice E. Colón Warren states,

Puerto Rico is indeed an arena where one can explore the impact of colonial relations on gender and other social hierarchies; the intersections, conflicts, and mutual constitution of gender, national, class, race, and sexual identities and practices; and the gendering of social spheres, functions and policies. (669)

In undertaking my investigation of Burgos, then, I engage sources which highlight how colonization has shaped, targeted, and exploited intersectional identities in Puerto Rico, while also paying attention to the ways in which the people and the land have been reduced to labor and commodities.

First-hand descriptions and analyses of Puerto Rico in its earliest colonial stage are not as numerous as those documented during and after the Spanish Bourbon era of colonization, and those that are available are primarily European. One of the earlier accounts appears in a British periodical issued in 1762. This brief piece provides a description of the island, its peoples, and the ravages of Spanish colonization on both the land and the people. It begins by identifying the island as “Borequen,” a misspelling of the indigenous Taíno name Borikén (“A Description of Puerto Rico” 591). Utilizing an early manifestation of what we now recognize as an insidious “noble savage” trope (Ellingson 374), the author of the article first describes the inhabitants as “a brave gallant people, and extremely fond of liberty” (“A Description of Puerto Rico” 591). This

portrayal is used to explain the great “cost” to the Spaniards in colonizing the island, though the author writes that ultimately the Spanish “succeed at last, and not only conquered, but extirpated the natives, who, at the first arrival of the Spaniards, are said to have amounted to six hundred thousand” (591). However, even while condemning the “inhuman conduct” of the Spanish, the presumably British author underlines the secondary value of the colonized inhabitants noting, “the destruction of the people proved the ruin of the island, and there is now no quantity of gold found in Puerto Rico, where it formerly abounded, and for the sake of which the poor innocent natives were slaughtered” (591).

In this discussion, the genocide of the poor innocents is bemoaned, but only in so much that the prize that caused their deaths is temporary. The brief discussion of this mass genocide is followed by a geographical description of the land, and the author again highlights its value by noting the “soil, which is beautifully diversified, is extremely fertile, abounding with fine meadows, well stocked with wild cattle” (591). However, this land of great agricultural promise is rendered less desirable from a colonialist’s perspective because of its “great droughts,” hurricanes, and the threat of privateers (591). Still, the author sees the promise of this Spanish outpost because it is “a center of the contraband trade carried on by the English and French” (592). Within this description, then, both inhabiting and observing colonizers have reduced Puerto Rican lands and people into objects of commodification.

Historian Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim provides greater context for evolving commodification and objectification in her studies on Puerto Rican nationalism and

revolts. Jiménez de Wagenheim describes Puerto Rico during the first three centuries of Spanish colonial rule as a world driven by a small, autonomous agrarian culture, wherein the inhabitants of the island “survived on subsistence farming and contraband trade with Spain’s rivals” (*Nationalist Heroines* 3). She describes this period as the “old colony,” a time when Spain and creole farmers were not exploiting the land for economic development (*El Grito de Lares* 2). Instead, the Island was sparsely populated, as farmers preferred to live isolated from their neighbors and far from Spanish rule in San Juan (2). This reliance on subsistence farming set Puerto Rico apart from other Spanish colonies that were more reliant on creole landowners and their massive haciendas (2).

This way of life was upended when the Bourbon Dynasty gained power in Spain in the late 1700s; the Bourbons enacted reforms throughout the Spanish Empire as a means to strengthen their control (*Nationalist Heroines* 3). Jiménez de Wagenheim calls this reform a “‘new’ colonization,” and while Spanish colonies in Latin America revolted against these reforms and successfully fought for independence under Creole leadership, Puerto Rico experienced the opposite effect. Puerto Rico did not resist this surge of imperial control. Jiménez de Wagenheim accounts for this lack of resistance as the result of underdevelopment and the absence of a ruling creole class in the colonies (*El Grito de Lares* 3). Rather, under the new Bourbon reforms, Puerto Rico’s agricultural system was expanded to create an export economy. To support this new economy, Spain needed to import people and capital, and they incentivized people to resettle in Puerto Rico by offering land grants and tax exemptions (*Nationalist Heroines* 3). In exchange, Spain required the following of these “settlers”: they must “cultivate the soil, pledge allegiance



to the king, pay tithe to the Catholic Church, and commit to stay in Puerto Rico” (3).

Given the revolutionary upheaval in many Latin American countries and Haiti, thousands fled from these areas to grasp hold of Spain’s promised opportunities, regardless of the strings attached. As Jiménez de Wagenheim notes, these incentives caused the population to balloon from 45,000 in 1765 to 600,000, including 34,000 slaves, in 1865 (3). This massive migration allowed the Spanish Empire to dictate preferences of land ownership, with the best options offered to “prospective planters who had experience growing sugarcane, owned slaves, or had capital and/or lines of credit which would enable them to begin cultivating their crops at once” (3-4). In contrast, free black immigrants from French and British Caribbean islands were allotted smaller portions of land to provide food and labor for the larger agricultural estates/plantations (4).

Thus, even in its development through the promise of opportunity, the Bourbon dynasty’s renewed colonization project maintained a systemically classed and racial hierarchy. As I examine in the next section, these hierarchies would become more deeply fortified as the people of Puerto Rico were forced to transition from Spanish colonial rule to US imperialism. Moreover, this transition would also bring gender and sexuality to the forefront as the new government worked to discipline its subjects.

### **Transitional Coloniality**

Communication scholar Ilia Rodriguez notes that the Spanish-American war “marked the ascent of the United States as a world power” (283). As the US claimed victory over Spain, “issues of imperialism, race, colonization, and economic progress converged in domestic debates on U.S. foreign policy” (283). Rodriguez argues this debate resulted in

“public discourse that emerged to justify the intervention of the United States as a colonizing power by representing the conquered peoples as subjects in need of continuing administration as colonials” (283-284). Thus, the US utilized its journalistic arm to produce “colonial discourses” (284), which Rodriguez describes as “historically specific, fragmented narratives and practices that combine in different ways to reinforce the central theme that metropolitan authority must be maintained over the colonized” (285). Integral to this process is both how the colonizers differentiate and Other the colonized while also requiring the colonized to identify with the colonizer “as a moral precondition for their civilizing mission” (285). Rodriguez cites cultural theorist Stuart Hall and others as she notes the significance of “racial stratification” in imperialist policies of cultural and national superiority (285). Namely, the root of colonization is racist ideology (285).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century context of the US conquest of the remaining Spanish colonies, including Puerto Rico, this ideology was deployed by imperialists under the guise of humanitarian “liberation,” but with an aim to generate a stagnant US economy (288). However, to reap the benefits of this conquest through US expansion, the US needed to construct newly “liberated” people through the racist lens of manifest destiny, which Rodriguez states is “based on the belief that Americans were a chosen people to bring progress and modernization to ‘inferior races’” (288). Thus, to bridge the perceived gap between democratic ideals and expansionist pursuits, the US utilized racist morality rhetoric to “‘regenerate’ people of color,” and under the auspices that to leave these peoples ungoverned would cruelly open them to ‘European anarchy,’ the US rhetorically constructed imperialism as a moral obligation to the “natives” (288). Rodriguez contends

that expansionist colonizer programs echoed the “accommodationist position” used toward African-Americans at the same time in the US (289), which were racist programs geared toward elevating “inferior” races through “tutelage in civilization” (qtd. in Rodriguez 289).

In terms of Puerto Rico, Rodriguez’s study is largely concerned with how US press coverage discursively performed the role of continued colonization throughout the transition from Spanish colonial rule to US imperialism. She writes that this colonization began with language as the US altered the name to “Porto Rico,” despite inhabitants’ preference and use of Puerto Rico, and that this was systemically perpetuated as “the subject of colonialist knowledge produced by military, juridical, administrative, and social institutions, including the school system and the press” (291). Her findings demonstrate that this colonialist discourse was intended to reinforce US colonial authority. Through this lens, Rodriguez identifies four “rhetorical modes” in European colonial discourse (299). These modes are: affirmation of colonial authority, surveillance of the territory, classification of character, and debasement.

Within each of these modes, the Puerto Rican is continually Othered in contrast to the colonizer. For example, in terms of surveillance, Rodriguez notes that while Puerto Rico is frequently described in US dispatches as “a promising land for development, focusing on its natural richness and beauty,” the people are “represented in illustrations as extensions of the landscape” (299). In terms of the more explicit US representations of Puerto Ricans, Rodriguez highlights how the colonizers utilized multiple identity categories for classification and debasement of the colonized. She writes:

This characterization emphasized the ‘innate qualities’ of the natives or the moral, racial, and socioeconomic differences between colonizer and colonized. Character, racial diversity, and lack of formal education, were cited as factors that constituted ‘Porto Ricans’ as the colonized other. Further, in the debasement of character, these texts reveal the dangerous, ‘savage’ nature of the same ‘submissive’ and ‘cheerful’ native who ‘welcomed’ invaders. This attribution of contradictory traits to colonized peoples has been discussed as a basic feature of colonial discourse across time that has helped to justify the maintenance of colonial authority over the natives. (299)

The racially and economically motivated, rhetorically constructed ‘Porto Rican’ was instrumental in inscribing “an identity for the colonized, and provided justification for the colonial administration of Puerto Rico by the United States” (299). In the next section, I examine how an imperial US identity inscription manifests intersectionally.

### **Intersectional Colonization: Examining Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the Body**

Although Rodriguez’s study examines how US imperialist expansion programs utilized rhetorical modes of colonization through race and class, it does not explore critical concepts like gender and sexuality. Thus, to better understand how colonization works intersectionally, I first turn to the work of critical social historian Mimi Sheller.

Sheller’s project focuses on the body and sexuality as points of granted or denied freedom, citizenship, and humanity in the Caribbean. Specifically, Sheller argues

Race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are bodily practices of differentiation that surface at the intersections of multiple forms of state ordering, moral regulation, self-discipline, and the systems of governance that endorse and make possible regimes of free citizenship. (22)

In other words, the body is always a site that cannot, in a Westernized, colonial framework, be divorced from state and social regulation. Therefore, in this section, I first examine the ways in which women’s bodies have been generally inscribed in the Caribbean. I then focus on the ways in which US imperialism, as read through racialized

VD laws in 1918, manifested in social, legal, and political readings of the female body in Puerto Rico.

Drawing from many theoretical frames including work on biopolitics, diasporic history, black feminist theory, Latinx studies, and interdisciplinary Caribbean feminist research, Sheller ultimately argues that the body is an intersectional culmination of Othering within many colonial, post-slavery Caribbean political spheres. Sheller is deeply invested in how “counterspaces of performance and counter-performance can sometimes reproduce governing ideals of respectability yet can also deploy sexual and erotic agency to undo the gender, racial, and sexual inequalities that uphold normative orders” (22). Sheller explores the politics of exclusion based in gender, race, ethno-nationalism, and sexuality (25). She writes,

The formation of the colonial bourgeois masculine body, of the emancipated black British subject, of the respectable Afro-Jamaican mother, of the indentured Coolie worker, or of the Haitian soldier-citizen are always located, relational identities, specific to a time and place. (28)

Thus, Sheller notes that a fundamental starting point into research of transgressive emancipation must involve a “history of the techniques and practices of differentiation that produce differently marked bodies in particular relations with others” (28).

Importantly, Sheller argues that the site of this investigation should be the everyday performance of citizenship (28).

While Sheller’s book examines these concepts in a variety of contexts, for the purposes of this project, I focus on how black and brown bodies in Puerto Rico were coerced, exploited, and excluded, particularly through reproductive labor within the US

imperial context. As a common thread throughout the text, Sheller keys in on civic and personal freedoms, and how sexual, racial, and ethnic boundaries are used to “compound durable inequality” (30). Sheller views citizenship as the best lens to examine these issues. Given Iliá Rodríguez’s argument that imperialism functions as the moral gatekeeper of citizenship, these two texts can be read together for a better understanding of how the exploitations of colonization and “democratic citizenship” might be read as parallel projects. For example, Sheller argues the intersectional exploitations and exclusions of citizenship are indelibly related to the “legacies of the sexual underpinnings of slavery, and the constrained forms of respectability, propriety, property, and autonomy that emancipation entailed and authorized” (30). In terms of the efficacy of sexual citizenship, reproductive labor becomes central as it is critical to “uphold the racially homologous patriarchal heterosexual family” (41). Thus, colonial socialization continued to discipline “black middle-class and working-class subjects through the institutions of the nuclear family” (225), both post-slavery and into the contemporary tourist age.

Drawing from Berlant, Sheller claims that discipline of the body was highly pronounced through reproductive politics, which she terms “erotic subjugation” (252). Sheller situates reproductive freedom and restrictions “in the ongoing salience of the limited recognition of the slave’s humanity” (252). Further, she highlights the binary that distinguishes an “asexual body of the universal free human” with that of the “sexualized, racialized, captive body of the powerless slave” (252). Following a harrowing discussion of the exploitive reproductive experiments carried out on Caribbean women of color, in which she cites a distinction between the body and the flesh, Sheller examines how

eugenics movements have deployed race- and nationality-motivated population control (255). As Ferguson and Briggs also support below, these movements have been aided and abetted by white elites who stigmatized Afro-Caribbean motherhood practices (255-256). Sheller concludes that the “racialized politics of reproduction and biopower become entangled with transnational forms of sexual subjugation through practices of birth control” (256).

Although not directly linking to Puerto Rico, Roderick Ferguson discusses the role of the prostitute as a site of racialized capitalism, writing that sex workers were a threat to heteropatriarchy domination. Thus, they were seen simultaneously as nonheteronormative disruptions to this system, and bourgeois and radical ideologues read the body of the prostitute “as the sign for the gendered and sexual chaos that commodification was bound to unleash” (9). Ferguson explains that the prostitute’s body was also deeply racialized in nineteenth-century England, a colonizing nation. Ferguson writes that Sarah Bartmann was connected to the image of the prostitute, which promoted and linked

the alleged sexual savagery of black women and to install nonwhite sexuality as the axis upon which various notions of womanhood turned. As industrial capital developed and provided working-class white women with limited income and mobility, the prostitute became the racialized figure that would enunciate anxieties about such changes. (9)

As noted below, the racialized prostitute was a concept that would also inform many political debates in the early twentieth century in Puerto Rico.

Reproductive historian Laura Briggs examines issues similar to Sheller and Ferguson. Briggs’s work is particularly focused on Puerto Rico and US imperialism. However, she begins her examination of sexual citizenship through the subject of prostitution and US-

instituted VD policies beginning in 1918. Situating her analysis in Puerto Rico complicates many of the concepts brought forth by Sheller and others because of the material legal and political ties between the US and Puerto Rico. Prior to the crippling economic blow to Puerto Rico through the institution of the Jones Act of 1920, the United States was already working to systemically control Puerto Rican bodies on a racialized micro-level. Briggs argues that forceful VD policies on the island were the result of US-driven narratives based in a “racial discourse of purity, exclusion, and nationalism” (59). In this lens, Puerto Rican women, particularly prostitutes, were positioned as threats to US soldiers and their mainland women; Briggs notes that from the US-mainland perspective, the “steamy tropics of Puerto Rico fairly stank of sexual excess, rot, and germs” (59). Briggs draws from the work of a Red Cross worker who disdained this perceived excess as a threat to the “fair-haired” white Americans to illustrate how Puerto Rican sex workers and immigrant laborers were discriminated against during the Jim Crow era (59). Puerto Ricans were framed as having a lack of “moral intelligence” and they were racialized and branded as “unmoral” natives (59). As a result of campaigns like this, a racialized black/white binary was placed on racially heterogeneous Puerto Rican bodies, and there was a distinct portrayal of “uniformly dark-skinned ‘natives’” as a serious threat to white Americans (60). However, as Puerto Ricans became the subject of US Army VD statistics, they were eventually split into three racialized categories: whites, Negroes, and mulattos (61).

Race informed much of the gendered and sexual discrimination in Puerto Rico regarding venereal disease. Briggs highlights how the case of Puerto Rican sex workers,



as approached by both conservative and liberal North American sides, illustrates racialized heteropatriarchy. Conservatives wanted to find a way to segregate and keep Americans safe from “(foreign, female) dirt and disease” (63). On the other hand, liberals framed their project as a benevolent movement to save “Puerto Rican women and children from their victimization by Puerto Rican men” (63). Yet, this project was one of assimilation, which Briggs describes as positioning “Puerto Ricans as ersatz citizens” (63). In turn, science was used to differentiate between Puerto Rican women’s bodies and North Americans; Briggs plays off a Homi Bhabha phrase, explaining that Puerto Rican women were classed as “almost the same, but not white” (Briggs 63). As troubling and discriminatory as the conservative segregationist view is, the liberal construct of the respectable “virtuous” women resulted in policies to incarcerate prostitutes in the name of “promoting ‘community health’” (63). Although this perspective renders some Puerto Rican bodies as not disposable, it neglects and vilifies others.

Moreover, these policies, in conjunction with US political narratives, situated Puerto Rican sexuality as the root of the problem, and resulted in “narratives of dangerous, racialized sex: the familiar huge genitals of the black male; the extraordinary, extravagant, and strange reproductive organs of the black female” (64). As Jennifer Nash points out, these fears are connected to “how black female sexuality is imagined to be rooted in (and perhaps generative of) certain kinds of filthy spaces, how black sexuality is constructed as literally and metaphorically dirty” (441). Thus, entangling some venereal diseases as “uniquely tropical” in these harmful narratives solidified North American perceptions and fears of deeply racialized, sexualized bodies (Briggs 64). As these

fraught ideologies began to be embraced by middle and upper classes within Puerto Rico, Briggs notes that prostitution “became a symbolic battleground for the Puerto Rican nation (or colony, depending on one’s point of view)” (65). Briggs describes the ideological struggle as one that was based on both race and gender:

The behavior of women prostitutes was at issue in a profoundly gendered way— male sexuality was not publicly scrutinized in the same way, and the “morality” or “disease” of men’s sexuality could not be made to stand for the malaise of the island / nation. Moreover, the claim to be able to rectify and manage working-class women’s sexuality and labor was made by embodying certain kinds of gendered behavior. North American military officials and scientists took up the masculine role of the expert, scientific, managerial knower in order to pronounce on prostitution policy and matters of governance in general. Spanish and Creole elites, in contrast, defended women by assuming the mantle of chivalrous manhood. As Ashis Nandy points out, establishing manhood as the grounding for claims to power can be said to constitute success for colonialism. (65)

Briggs argues that this gendered battle over women’s bodies highlights the way in which colonialism reproduces itself, as upper-class members of the colonized population participated in “the sign systems that constitute the various oppressed groups as subordinate: class exploitation, racism, paternalism, machismo, heterosexism, and so on” (65).

Importantly, Puerto Rican men were not the only ones upholding these colonial systems. Puerto Rico had its own designated chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WTCU), which worked through “female moral authority” to safeguard the home by imposing a “moral high ground (particularly with respect to sex) and hence had an obligation to ‘clean up’ the (dirty, military, and commercial) public sphere” (66). This position was problematic because it used concern for “poor unfortunates” and working-class sexuality to solidify their moral authority. Briggs notes

that the “prostitution reform battle of 1918 rendered the prostitute herself politically inert—rhetorically by turning her into a symbol, and actually, by imprisoning her” (66). Thus, Briggs concludes, the Puerto Rican prostitute’s racialized, gendered body served as site of enforcing political and sexual regulations that ultimately upheld violent colonial notions of heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism, aided and abetted by the maternalist morality of the WTCU (66-67).

Class was also a critical component of these struggles. Even as elite women were building their moral temples on the sacrificed bodies of poor sex workers, poor women from dislocated rural classes were becoming more visible in the public sphere. Just as the battle over what to do with prostitute bodies devolved into moral “heroism,” other poor women were also pulled into a similar class as “‘loose’ women in need of containment” (Briggs 71). Briggs notes that male Puerto Rican politicians capitalized on this situation, and they “cast themselves as the protectors of wronged womanhood in order to struggle with North American colonial officials and the federal government over questions of status, victimization, and citizenship” (71). In essence, poor women’s bodies continued to serve as sites of political battle, reinforcing gender, race, class, and sexuality stereotypes. As Briggs argues: “The debate over the suppression of prostitution was simultaneously a response to the reconfiguration of the island as a geography of American citizens, a referendum on it, and a means for elites to achieve political realignments” (71), rendering the debate over prostitution merely a “highly symbolic and stylized debate over status in and through the medium of women’s bodies” (71). Finally, arguing that the incarceration

of women sex workers was an allegory of the relationship between Puerto Rico and North America, Briggs contends that

through rhetorics of gender and race, both Puerto Rican elites and North American colonials worked to solidify their claims to power, to position themselves in relation to each other, and to develop a series of pliable, manipulable symbols for understanding each other (73).

Although Briggs begins her history through prostitution reform, she also engages concerns similar to Sheller's thoughts on reproductive labor and its implications on the Puerto Rican body. Citing a number of female theorists/activists who have examined Puerto Rico as an experiment in racialized social engineering, Briggs writes "Puerto Rico was the most advanced case of a U.S. foreign policy of population control and capitalist expansion in Latin America" (143). Illustrating the racial divide in Puerto Rico and the US, Briggs highlights Angela Davis's argument that the Puerto Rico case is a clear "example of racism in the women's movement: white women continued to urge freedom from reproduction, even in a context where it was coercive" (143). Briggs also turns to recent movements to produce alternative feminist versions of forced sterilization narratives (160). Arguing that Puerto Rican wombs were politicized, Briggs cites Margarita Ostolaza Bey, who confronts anticolonialist narratives of sterilization which insist that "sterilization was designed to exterminate Puerto Rican-ness itself, as if puertorriqueñidad depended on the number of times Puerto Rican women give birth" (qtd. in Briggs 160). Ostolaza Bey also engages colonial politics by arguing:

the fact that the labor force is reproduced in the woman's body...makes her responsible for the rise in unemployment...the increase in public debt...According to this ideological discourse, it seems that women are responsible for having given birth to two million surplus Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans in excess. (qtd. in Briggs 160)

Finally, Ostolaza Bey keys in on the anticolonialist nostalgia discourse as “hispanophilic, antifeminist, and reactionary because it is based on the idea that the past—any past—was better” (qtd. in Briggs 160). Ultimately, Ostolaza Bey presents work that concludes that US imperialism and Spanish colonialism and their disciplinary structures are not inherently different.

These authors demonstrate the inherent connection between colonization, US imperialism, and physical, social, and legislative control over Puerto Rican women’s bodies and sexuality during the earliest stages of US control of the island. They also illustrate the racialized and classed components that manifested within Puerto Rican society. As Briggs highlights, colonization in Puerto Rico continued to flourish as the “white,” elite culture invoked minoritizing hierarchies on their poorer, darker neighbors. This example demonstrates three things: 1) the overlap between a European colonialism project and the US imperialism project; 2) how these projects are inherently driven by racialization, by and through which its participants police gender, sexuality, and class; 3) the willingness of privileged colonized subjects to participate in the policing of racialized bodies that are deemed beneath their status in the imperial hierarchy. In the next section, I will examine how the participatory culture in the gendered, patriarchal entanglements prevailed even in resistive anti-Imperialist factions in Puerto Rico.

### **Constraints of Colonial Identity in the Interwar Period**

Puerto Rican historian Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz argues for specific emphasis on the intersectional relationship between race and “womanhood” in examining the history of

the island prior to World War II. She is particularly invested, as are other scholars cited in this chapter, with the extent to which

racial differences between Puerto Ricans—especially among island women—were class-inscribed, sexualized, and/or gendered; and to what extent the broader social practices among all Puerto Ricans were informed by notions of ‘womanhood’ and ‘race.’ (74)

For Jiménez-Muñoz, the best way to investigate these relationships is to examine women’s narratives along with historical events. She draws from scholars like Spivak and Barkley Brown to advocate for the use of literary and non-literary narratives that transcribe how racial, gendered, and class difference manifest in Puerto Rican society (74). Jiménez-Muñoz writes,

exploring the centrality of how the intersection of ‘womanhood’ and ‘race’ was constructed, imagined, and lived among Puerto Ricans at this time will help elucidate male-centered and westernized/Hispanophilic perspectives, particularly their impact on the configuration of Puerto Rican cultures and scholarships everywhere. (75)

Although Jiménez-Muñoz does not explicitly use the term colonialism in this context, her interest in investigating narratives for intersectional identities is driven by a desire to overturn entrenched western narratives.

To this end, Jiménez-Muñoz examines the work of interwar poet Carmen Maria Colón Pellot, wherein she explains that both historical descriptions and contemporary critiques describe Colón Pellot as a “tragic mulata” and she compares her representation to that of white Puerto Rican poets (75-76). I include this study because Jiménez-Muñoz makes an important note about how we present and value knowledge, arguing that this racial casting typifies:

The position that women of color have occupied in history in general and in Puerto Rican history in particular. For the most part, they have been simply absent—or, when they are present, they are isolated points of reference usually cited out of context...and, once again, fleetingly. Is this the only way that Colón Pellot's voice will be, or can be, represented and historicized? (76)

David Blaney and Arlene Tickner and Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, among other decolonial scholars, argue that one of the ways colonialism remains unchecked is due to our refusal to reevaluate our different ways of knowing and being. Thus, Jiménez-Muñoz's insistence that scholars reexamine how they have racialized, diminished, and erased certain Puerto Rican women, particularly those from the interwar era, is an important consideration in a study which seeks to explore the relationship between colonialism, imperialism, and a woman like Julia de Burgos, who operated outside of patriarchal norms.

In her 2014 book *Becoming Julia de Burgos: The Making of a Puerto Rican Icon*, Vanessa Pérez Rosario works against the common trend of academic erasure by highlighting Julia de Burgos's intersectional identities and how they contested continued colonial discourses in the Puerto Rican Generación del Treinta (Generation of the 1930s). Pérez Rosario writes that the era of artists, writers, and activists during this period were working to construct Puerto Rican culture and character, and they were “obsessed with totalizing genres that they believed would heal the wounds of colonialism” (2). However, Pérez Rosario notes that despite this commitment to “articulating a sense of Puerto Rican identity in the face of U.S. colonialism” (15), the result served to reify a paternalistic activist core, with a “literary canon that was written primarily by men, concerned with nation building, and characterized by the metaphor of colonialism as illness” (15). As

Pérez Rosario explains, despite the *treintistas*' rejection of colonialism and the construction of *jíbaro*<sup>3</sup> identity connected to the land, their politics were contradictory, and they embraced Spanish culture as their "'noble' heritage." They were intent on crafting a problematic literary canon based on the nostalgia for the *jíbaro*, the figure of the colonizing farmer who happily lived off the land before US rule. As Pérez Rosario points out,

The *jíbaro*-based national identity fails to acknowledge the centuries of Spanish colonialism, the struggles for independence from Spain, and the legacy of slavery on the island. While many of these writers called for a return to the land, most of them lived in the city. This nostalgic identity shuns modernization and urbanization while rejecting U.S. imperialism. The idealization of *jíbaro* ignored the island's labor movement as well as the problems associated with poverty, such as poor hygiene, disease, malnutrition, and lack of education. (16)

Moreover, this identity also does not account for gender or continued racialization in any real way. Pérez Rosario argues that counter to the *jíbaro* embracing *treintistas*, whose literary contributions were almost exclusively novels, there also existed *vanguardia* poets who rejected the claims of a Spanish colonial world of balance and harmony (16). Rather, this parallel movement worked through counternarratives as they were searching for "something new, the redefinition of art, the creation of manifestos published in small magazines, experimentations, and the autochthonous. Their work explores the present and the future, the urban, and a hybrid and fragmented world" (16). In this way,

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<sup>3</sup> *Jíbaro*, sometimes seen in earlier writings as *gíbaro* (Betances), is a term typically used to describe poor rural peoples, such as farmers. It also implies a lack of education, and it can be a marker of both class and race on the island as many *jíbaros* are of African or indigenous descent.



*vanguardias* were exploring how to combat colonialism while also acknowledging its role in their current reality.

One of the poets working in this vein was Julia de Burgos. In analyzing Burgos's early poetry, Pérez Rosario explains that Burgos does not "deny the island's violent history of colonialism and slavery. She abandons the concept of a harmonious world suspended outside of time and acknowledges the complexity and heterogeneity of the modern world and of Puerto Rico" (20). For Burgos, this acknowledgment of the colonial condition and the rejection of paternalistic nostalgia are critical steps in healing "the wound of colonialism" (22). Burgos's poetry is highly attuned to the violence, pain, and anguish caused by the history and contemporary "condition" of colonialism on the Island (21). However, as Pérez Rosario argues, Burgos rejects "totalizing narratives" and instead embraces "solidarity and attachments consistent with a nomadic politics that is 'a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections'" (22). In breaking with the "great familial narrative" that sprang from the nostalgia for Spanish colonialism, Burgos also contends that Puerto Rican identity can only be achieved through independence (22).

Pérez Rosario accounts for Burgos's rejection of all forms of colonialism, current and nostalgic, as the result of her own positionality as a marginalized woman in Puerto Rico. Pérez Rosario details Burgos's life on the island as one wherein working-class women were subject to "racially charged, sexual demonization" (28), and they were also exposed to the repressive colonial government, wherein women of higher racial and class privilege served to police the sexuality and gender roles of poorer Puerto Rican women. This is a claim supported by the earlier work of Briggs, as noted above. Against this

culture, Burgos was a target as she began to resist many of these roles and norms, publicly rejecting the use of her married name in both personal correspondence and in her role with the *Frente Unido Femenino*. This was just one of many moves through which Burgos “abandoned the project of constructing a socially acceptable image” (22). Pérez Rosario and other scholars like Acosta-Belén argue that these rejections of social norms, coupled with Burgos’s background as a mixed-race, poor woman, rendered her a “subversive” in an increasingly repressive climate (Acosta-Belén 191). In turn, Burgos used her colonial restraints to explore avenues for escape, and as Pérez Rosario acknowledges, her poetry anticipated her own exile as they dealt with and combatted the “restrictive confines of the insular, colonial, and patriarchal nation” (45). It is within her poetry where Burgos first lays the foundation for a resistive project, acknowledging and rejecting the claims of colonialism on her body. As Pérez Rosario argues, Burgos’s nuanced hybrid approach to colonialism, outside of the nostalgic Spanish narratives of her peers, enabled her to become “one of the most significant voices challenging the canon’s patriarchy, classism, racism, and geographical borders” (95). Understanding how Burgos accomplished this is also a critical juncture to begin to understand how Puerto Ricans continue to be shaped by colonialism and what the future might look like.

### **Foundational Summary**

In this chapter, I have worked to illustrate how colonialism has constructed and constrained intersectional, embodied identities in Puerto Rico. My goal was to express the pervasiveness of colonialism (and imperialism), as well as its continued presence, throughout Puerto Rican history. I have also sought to express how colonialism

constructs the bodies of the colonized. Understanding the uninterrupted nature of colonialism and its influence on social and legal power structures is critical for my study of Julia de Burgos. Thus, in the next chapter, I examine how the United States Postal Service continues the process of state-sponsored colonization through public memory in the form of the propagation of a middlebrow multicultural narrative of Julia de Burgos.

### **Chapter 3: Commemoration as Colonization**

In this chapter, I analyze the Julia de Burgos commemorative stamp released by the United States Postal Service in 2010. Through this analysis, I call for a reevaluation of the relationship between public memory projects and multiculturalism. I argue that when state-sponsored entities invoke multicultural representation within commemorative projects, their static displays of “diversity” and “inclusion” strip agency from Othered subjects and render them commodities. This work enters into conversation with memory scholars who engage power relationships at play in state-sponsored public memory projects, as well as scholars who critique the role of multiculturalism in the United States. My research is specifically concerned with the ways in which state-sponsored public memory projects continue the process of colonization by flattening and monetizing simplistic narratives of minority subjects for mass consumption as a means of upholding the “master narrative” in the United States of assimilation/ascension through excellence. Given Julia de Burgos’s anti-US imperialism stance and her allegiance to a hemispheric Puerto Rican identity, independent of the patriarchal nationalism tied to Spanish colonial narratives, the USPS commemoration narrative of Burgos is an excellent study in the dangers of representation through middlebrow multiculturalism.

Released at the beginning of National Hispanic Heritage Month on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Burgos stamp was dedicated as part of the USPS Literary Arts series as

well as the Hispanic Subject Postage Stamp series. At the first-day-of-issue stamp ceremony, USPS representative Jordan Small acknowledged Burgos thusly:

Today, the Postal Service honors Julia de Burgos, a revolutionary writer, thinker and activist. Dr. de Burgos wrote more than 200 poems that probe issues of love, feminism, and political and personal freedom. Her groundbreaking works urged women, minorities and the poor to defy social conventions and find their own true selves. (Suarez Casey)

Embedded in a celebratory tone of Hispanic heritage, this truncated sketch of Burgos's significance displays a positive representation of the Latina in the United States. In this USPS "cultural celebration" version, Burgos ticks all the "feel good" boxes in terms of the minority-come-American hero: she advocated for education for the disenfranchised, she was an avid supporter of freedom, she believed in individualism, and she was an immigrant. This carefully curated vision of Burgos as a positive cultural representation is one that is not uncommon in the world of multicultural inclusivity or public memory projects. Indeed, pushing back against negative national stereotypes and portrayals, marginalized groups have often fought to incorporate positive cultural representations into the national landscape through monuments, museums, art installations, and movements (del Río 179-181).

Although I agree that projects which offer positive representatives of the Latina/o/x community are important in the face of the many negative stereotypes surrounding Latina/o/x peoples in US political and popular culture, I argue that we should be cognizant of the ways in which we manifest the positive binary. Specifically, I am concerned with how public memory projects capitalize on diversity by exhibiting middlebrow multiculturalism, an economic and institutional form of "diversity" that

causes some to ignore or deny deeply inherent institutional racism. We must be critical of the ways in which people of color are “allowed” into national discourse through state-sponsored monuments, museums, and circulated national emblems like currency and stamps. As a Latina, I would also argue that when our communities engage in panethnic projects to provide positive portrayals of Latina/o/x peoples, we must first acknowledge how white power structures that fund these movements articulate a particularly insidious type of essentialist appropriation. In the haste to purportedly “include,” many of these memory projects close off dialogue about how US power structures are actually engaging in further discipline of bodies, ideas, and voices from the margins. I’m particularly concerned with national emblems as they exhibit politics of representation, which in Stuart Hall’s words, “gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life” (443).

As an object of study, I am drawn to the Burgos stamp precisely because of the articulation of Burgos as a positive Americanized representation of the female revolutionary hero. In actuality, her biography and writing reveal a much more complicated, complex persona who operated outside of a simple positive/negative binary. For this chapter, I situate my understanding of articulation in both Stuart Hall and Esteban del Rio. Del Rio argues that “for the study of Latinidad, articulation posits that we understand the conditions and purposes under which general market media and cultural texts define, shape, and unify a Latina/o people” (183). Del Rio advocates for a reflexive understanding of articulation, noting that articulation is frequently positioned

within positive and negative binaries and utilized to “confront ‘negative’ stereotypes and replace them with ‘positive’ alternatives” (183).

I also adopt del Río’s method of looking at extratextual methods of articulation. By examining the USPS and its decision-making process as a state-sponsored, economically dependent entity, I situate the Hispanic Subject Stamp series as an articulation of “Latinidad in a conjunctural way that is...the result of a negotiation of middlebrow multiculturalism, the tension between bottom-up and top-down interests, and institutional tensions” (del Río 184). I extend this reading of the series into broader claims about the problematic nature of state public memory projects. I contend that privileging public sites of memory in our scholarship does a disservice to both the subjects we study as well as the communities whose identities may be intricately linked to more personal, performative forms of remembrance.

This chapter is organized into three parts. I first provide a brief history of Burgos, highlighting the role of the continued colonization of Puerto Rico in shaping her life and work. Next, I engage the USPS stamp series, outlining the political and economic motivations behind stamp selection before focusing on the Burgos stamp in particular. In the third section, I explain the pivotal, problematic role of middlebrow multiculturalism in public memory projects. Here, I make the case that Julia de Burgos, through a literally flattened image (and attending narrative), is a prime example of how multicultural public memory projects both commodify and erase critical components of those who are most vulnerable to erasure.

## **Julia de Burgos: An Anti-American Hero**

In “Oración” [Prayer], dedicated to Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader and spokesperson for the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party from 1930-1965, Julia de Burgos writes:

Pero si a heróica lucha libertarian  
te impulsase el honor y la consciencia,  
para limpiar la patria del tirano  
e izar gloriosa su inmortal bandera;

a tu lado estaré, para arrancarle  
al traidor opresor y miserable  
gota a gota la sangre envilecida.

[But if to a heroic liberating struggle  
Your honor and conscience thrust you  
to cleanse the homeland of the tyrant  
and raise glory in its immortal flag;

I will be by your side, to rip from  
the miserable traitor oppressor  
his vile blood drop by drop.] (414-415)

This poem, and other verses and essays like it, reveal Burgos’s commitment to Puerto Rican independence. In her writing, the United States is not a reluctant or benevolent caretaker of Puerto Rico (Caronan 338). Rather, Burgos views US-imperialism and its proxy government on the island as oppressive tyrants. Under a call for liberty, Burgos memorializes fallen student Manuel Rafael Suárez Diaz, a young nationalist who died in a demonstration in Old San Juan in 1932. Burgos writes:

Impávido y altivo ofrendaste tu vida,  
henchida con la savia de tus sueños en flor,  
a la causa doliente de la patria oprimida  
que sufre los rigors de extranjera invasion.



[Dauntless and haughty you offered your life,  
satiated with the sap of your dreams in flower,  
to the painful cause of your oppressed homeland  
that suffers the rigors of foreign invasion.] (484-485)

She continues, describing Suárez Díaz's death an "immaculate offering" which "is the first wick/ that will ignite the bonfire of the revolution" (485). As these verses illustrate, Burgos, like many of her Nationalist peers, viewed revolution as the only path to independence from the United States.

Given Julia de Burgos's personal history, there is little surprise that she would resist the U.S. regime in Puerto Rico. In his introduction to the most comprehensive translation of Burgos's poetry to date, Harlem activist and poet Jack Agüeros describes Burgos's life as one which was lived under the shroud of U.S. occupation. Born in 1914, Burgos was one of thirteen children in a poor *jíbaro* family. Growing up in the mountains outside of Carolina, Puerto Rico, Burgos's life coincided with the U.S. imposition of citizenship on Puerto Rico in 1917 ("Introduction" v). Against the backdrop of World War I, Agüeros writes that citizenship was imposed upon the island, despite the protests of the Puerto Rican elected Chamber of Delegates, as a "cynical American gift—a 'gift' to insure the draftability of Puerto Rican men into the U.S. army" (vii). This imposition of citizenship was the kindling for the resistance to U.S. rule, and as Agüeros notes, it was an event that had significant influence on Burgos's poetry and politics (vii).

As a poor woman of African descent, Burgos's options were extremely limited. Growing up in rural Puerto Rico, Burgos's family was particularly subject to the ravages of poverty, and six of her siblings died of malnutrition and other diseases (Pérez Rosario

7). To assist her family, Burgos pursued a teaching certificate from the University of Puerto Rico and she began teaching in 1935. However, Burgos was unable to afford further education to advance her teaching career, and she moved from Barrio Cerro Ariba in Naranjito to Old San Juan with her first husband Ruben Rodriguez Beauchamp in 1936. Between the years 1934 and 1938, Burgos began to publish her poetry. She also started to associate with other poets, including her mentor Luis Lloréns Torres, as well as many members of the Nationalist party (Pérez Rosario 7). At this time, her poetry became more political as she penned and published the poem “Es nuestra la hora (Ours is the Hour).” This poem is a strong denouncement of US-imperialism and a call for revolution.

Burgos urges:

Campesino noble  
tu desgracia tiene solo una respuesta:  
El Imperialismo de Estados Unidos  
tiene una ancha fosa:  
    allí está tu muerta  
    allí el pequeñuelo  
    allí tu vaquita  
    allí está tu yegua  
    tu “tala” y tu tierra.

Campesino noble  
tu tragedia tiene solo una repuesta:  
    afila tu azada  
    afieta el machete  
    y temple tu alma.

[Noble peasant  
your disgrace has but one response:  
The imperialism of the United States  
has a wide grave:  
    there is your dead wife  
    there your little one  
    there your cow

there your mare  
your field and your land.

Noble peasant  
your tragedy has but one response:  
sharpen your hoe  
whet your machete  
and temper your soul.] (404-405)

In this poem, and those noted above, Burgos's verses continue to urge revolution. She routinely documents the violence caused by US imperialism in her poetry, and her poetry implicitly acknowledges the futility of state-sponsored resolution. Burgos's call for independence requires embodied revolt as the only remedy for tyranny. Burgos ends this poem with a hopeful wish:

Y la tiranía bailará su danza  
la danza macabra de la despedida  
envuelta en la sangre de los mil traidores  
que han alimentado  
su vil salvajismo  
y su cobardía.

¡A formar compañeros  
a formar,  
que es nuestra la hora!  
¡Nuestra!  
¡Nuestra!  
¡Nuestra!

[And tyranny will dance its dance  
—the macabre dance of departure—  
wrapped in the blood of the thousand traitors  
who have nourished  
their vile savagery  
and their cowardice.

Assemble companions,  
Assemble,  
Ours is the hour!

Ours!  
Ours!  
Ours!] (408-409)

Yet, even as Burgos's poetry and critical writing supported the Nationalist party, she was still subject to the patriarchal agenda of the Puerto Rican political elite. In 1938, her marriage dissolved and she began an affair with a wealthy Dominican exile, Juan Isidro Jimenés Grullon. As Burgos historian Vanessa Pérez Rosario notes, their relationship "challenged and defied the Old World hierarchies that separated two people of their social positions" (8). Isolated and under the intense scrutiny of the San Juan elite, Burgos left Puerto Rico permanently, traveling with Grullon to New York and then Cuba (8-9). Following the end of their affair in 1942, Burgos moved back to New York alone, where she entered the Harlem arts scene and continued to write poetry that worked to build a hemispheric sense of *puertorriqueñidad*. As Pérez Rosario observes, Burgos's writings "reveal her understanding of cultural identity as fluid and unbound by national territory" (9).

In New York, and for a brief time in Washington DC, Burgos wrote for the Spanish-language socialist journal *Pueblos Hispanos*. Yet, her life was difficult as she struggled to find work, moving from office jobs to jobs in factories. She briefly married again, a Puerto Rican musician named Armondo Marín. As their relationship ended, Burgos began to have severe health problems, and she was frequently hospitalized for complications related to alcoholism and depression. During this time, Burgos kept up a journal as well as regular correspondence with her sister. Pérez Rosario has tracked letters between Burgos and her sister that describe Burgos as suicidal as well as frustrated

with her care (10). She was frequently bothered by the hospital staff's continual comments about her physical features, including comments about her "coarse, bristly hair," and she was under sedation much of the time due to advancing cirrhosis of the liver (10). Burgos died, alone and impoverished, on the streets of New York on July 5, 1953. She was not identified at the time of her death, and she was initially buried in Potter's Field. When her death was discovered by friends, her body was repatriated back to Carolina, Puerto Rico (1).

In reviewing scholarship and histories about Julia de Burgos, many of them begin with her early demise. As Agüeros argues, it is but one of the tragedies that sustains the legend of Burgos for Puerto Ricans. Yet, Pérez Rosario writes that this fixation on Burgos's death only perpetuates narratives of victimhood (1). Thus, Pérez Rosario's history of Burgos serves as a recalibration in Burgos scholarship, wherein she moves Burgos from tragic genius to a nomadic subject whose poetry and activism created "escape routes to transcend the rigid confines of gender and cultural nationalism" (1). This new reading of Burgos, one whose exile was liberatory rather than tragic, also provides a way to engage the continuing crisis of Puerto Rican colonization.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Pérez Rosario's work is formative in this project because it investigates Burgos from a positionality of active agent in her liberation. Pérez Rosario's focus on Burgos as a nomadic subject is critical in understanding her appeal in the Puerto Rican imaginary. Puerto Rico continues to be shaped and limited by continued US colonization. The ways in which this colonization disciplines certain bodies, those who are always Othered due to their race, class, gender, and sexuality, renders liberation

impossible. Pérez Rosario writes that against an imperial government and a patriarchal resistance that rendered poor, brown and black women static, “Burgos creates a dynamic subject that could not be fixed or contained... she attempts to create escape routes as a liberatory strategy” (3). Yet, as Pérez Rosario notes, Burgos’s physical escape to Cuba and, finally, New York did not provide the liberation she longed for in her poems and correspondence (3). Rather, Burgos’s migration was plagued by the same patriarchal restrictions she had fled in Puerto Rico. This reading of Burgos illustrates how the pervasiveness of colonial politics renders colonized peoples always already nomadic subjects.

In terms of memory, this colonized positionality means that public memory projects are inherently positioned to replicate the process of colonization. Further, these projects benefit from maintaining narratives of multicultural exceptionalism. The economic and political ties to such projects, as discussed in the next section, reveal the state’s interest in commodifying a sanitized image of diverse heroines. Rather than celebratory or commemorative, however, these projects are merely representational breadcrumbs designed to assuage, assimilate, and accumulate more wealth off the bodies of its subjects. In the next section, I examine how the USPS functions as a state entity engaged in a public memory project. I tie this extratextual research into a broader discussion about the dangers of representation through middle-brow multiculturalism.

### **Commemoration, Multiculturalism, and the USPS**

Understanding how stamps function as articulations of national identity is integral to my project. Knowledge of the stamp selection process and its political entanglements

throughout different phases of the process are critical elements of this understanding.

Within this section, I first outline the process of selecting a stamp. I focus primarily on the roles of the postmaster general and any interest groups with lobbying power that might influence subject selection. I then explain how stamps shape national identity.

### **The Politics of Stamp Selection**

According to the United States Postal Service (USPS), stamps are selected by a Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC). This committee is appointed by the sitting postmaster general. The committee's purpose is to select and recommend subjects for future stamps. The brief description of the CSAC is the first instance where the USPS engages in universalistic language, stating that these decisions are "made with all postal customers in mind" ("Stamp Advisory Committee"). While this statement is seemingly general and innocuous, it is the first hint of the national nature of the stamp.

The CSAC has been in place since 1957, and the members are selected based on their expertise in "history, science, technology, art, education, sports, and other subjects of public interest" ("Background"). The committee has quarterly confidential meetings to select and recommend subjects to the postmaster general. The final subject choice rests with the postmaster general. According to the USPS, the CSAC recommends 25-30 subjects a year, with emphasis on the "interests and needs of postal customers, as well as those of the stamp-collecting community" ("Background"). The consideration of stamp collectors, what one might consider amateur curators, demonstrates the potential long-term significance of the stamp.

The selection of a subject for recommendation is a lengthy process that begins with submission proposals from the public or public interest groups. The language for submission is critical; the USPS states: “The Postal Service welcomes written suggestions for stamp subjects that help portray the diversity of the American experience for a worldwide audience” (“Stamp Selection”). Written proposals that meet the criteria outlined below are then forwarded to the CSAC and subject to the following process. First, the Stamp Development office acknowledges receipt of the proposal. Then, Stamp Development determines whether the proposal meets necessary guidelines. Following these two steps, the proposal is then forwarded to the CSAC where the committee either chooses to not recommend or “holds the subject for future consideration” (“Stamp Selection”). The stamps held for consideration are then forwarded to the postmaster general for approval. As noted above, the postmaster general makes the final decision on both subject and design of all postage stamps. If a stamp is approved, the initial proponent of the subject is not notified and does not receive any credit or compensation (“Stamp Selection”).

The CSAC use eleven basic criteria for commemorative subject eligibility. I am primarily concerned with the criteria that explicitly relate to “American” identity, nationalism, or populism. As a note, throughout the history and guidelines of the CSAC, the Postal Service repeatedly uses the term American, rather than any US designation. Thus, I have adopted their language as I discuss the necessary criteria. The first criterion on the USPS website states: “U.S. postage stamps and stationery will primarily feature American or American-related subjects” (“Stamp Selection”). The second criterion



similarly states that the USPS “will honor extraordinary and enduring contributions to American society, history, culture, or environment” (“Stamp Selection”). The seventh criterion outlines that “a balance of stamp subjects that includes themes of widespread national appeal and significance will be considered for commemoration” (“Stamp Selection”). Finally, the ninth criterion provides the goal of the stamp program, stating that it “commemorates positive contributions to American life, history, culture and environment; therefore, negative occurrences and disasters will not be commemorated on U.S. postage stamps or stationery” (“Stamp Selection”).

The emphasis on furthering positive contributions of “American life, history, culture, and environment” is significant because of the nature of the stamp’s selection. While any member of society can propose a stamp, and the CSAC is comprised of a group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and fields of expertise, ranging from philately to sports commentary to African American Studies (“Committee Members”). Still, the decision to select or reject a largely circulated emblem of American identity is in the hands of the appointed Postmaster General. While the president appointed the postmaster general as recently as Richard Nixon’s presidency, the position is now appointed by a Board of Governors. However, despite this separation from the presidency, the position is still politically driven as the Board of Governors are appointed by the president under the “advice and consent” of the Senate (“Board of Governors”). Currently, the Board of Governors serve terms of seven years. A postmaster general becomes a member of the board upon appointment, but they serve “at the pleasure of the governors for an indefinite term” (“Board of Governors”). Thus, a postmaster general’s economic, social, and

political decisions are mandated by the politics of the board of governors and tangentially by Congress.

The political nature of the postmaster general's job is not recent. In fact, it is one of the oldest, and formerly, most politically powerful positions in the United States (Nugochi). Its connection to the presidency and Congress renders the organization and the postmaster general integral during times of national unrest, while also vulnerable to political power moves. The former was illustrated during the Civil War when Postmaster General Blair used the postal service to censor the confederacy (Buchanan). The latter was illustrated in the mid-2000s when post office management was the subject of heated debate as Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe came under fire from Congress and labor unions (Nugochi). Ultimately, despite cutting the USPS deficit, Donahoe was forced to resign under pressure from what he deemed an "irresponsible" Congress (Sanburn).

The postmaster general's accountability to Congressional pressure is an important consideration when examining postage stamp selection. Stamps, like monuments and museums, function in a way that shapes national identity. Historian Gary Osmond noted, "stamps are sources of symbolic messages from governments, representing national identities and official cultures" (314). Geographers Raento and Brunn argued that stamps are political as their wide circulation results in "citizenship education, together with commemorative street-naming and currency, which also promote a particular story of the nation in the citizens' quotidian environment" (49). They continued:

Stamps serve the construction of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) through 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) by guaranteeing the visibility of the patria in quotidian landscapes and preventing its citizens from forgetting who they are (or are

expected to be) and where they (are expected to) belong. With the help of stamps (and money, street names, flags and other territorially defined, authority-related political iconography present in everyday landscapes), a carefully designed representation of 'us' is being 'flagged' in a constant, but often taken-for-granted, fashion. (Raento and Brunn 50)

These scholars pave the way for the argument that the partisan relationship between Congress and the postmaster general is significant in determining national identity. As memory scholars like Ekaterina Haskins note, public commemoration in the United States is critical in developing "a master narrative" of national identity by elite powers, typically white rich men ("Reimagining of National Identity" 49). Because a stamp functions as a marker of a circulated narrative of national identity, that identity is shaped by the decision of the postmaster general, who in turn is beholden to a partisan congress. Thus, in returning to the criteria set forth by the USPS regarding the articulation of "American" people, the postage stamp is a loaded, partisan marker of national identity.

However, this bias is not the sole domain of the postmaster general. Given that stamp recommendations are open to the public, bias can also begin at the earliest stage. In their study of Finnish postage stamps, Raento and Brunn noted that the ability for citizens to participate in stamp design resulted in a "stronger national consensus over national identity and citizenship education," making "biases and absences in stamp imagery appear ever more striking" (71). Osmond's work is particularly concerned with interest groups who engage in "highly contested battles" for stamp themes (313). He argued that interest groups now "lobby" for stamps that "commemorate their special interest, whose job it is to link their pet project with a greater national agenda" (315). Thus, here we see that even when a stamp project is pushed by a special interest group, the agenda is closely

connected to entrance into national identity. Osmond argued that understanding how stamps reach issue is important in gaining “insight into cultural meanings and localised memories” (315). The commemorative stamp is central to Osmond’s study. He argued that “as histories in miniature, they offer selective readings of the past” (313).

Osmond’s reading of the stamp underlines how the stamp operates as a public memory project as outlined by Blair et al. Among other things, these scholars identify public memory as that which is “activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties;” that which “narrates shared identities, constructing sense of communal belonging;” that which is “partial, partisan, and thus often contested;” that which “relies on material and/or symbolic supports;” and that which has a history (Blair et al. 6). While each of these elements are critical to understanding how the Burgos stamp is utilized by the USPS, I’m particularly interested in the way in which we recognize or evaluate contestation of public narratives. While John Bodnar argues that public memory reveals much about structures of power in society (15), David Blight accounts for our tendency to accept master narratives projects as he notes how public memory is “often treated as a sacred set of potentially absolute meanings and stores, possessed as the heritage or identity of a community” (2).

Haskins connects this understanding of memory to the commemorative stamp, as she urges caution in how we read circulated emblems of national identity. Haskins is particularly interested in the production of collective memory, and she argues that stamps “always speak on behalf of the entire nation and as such claim to represent crucial aspects of national identity to citizens and outsiders alike” (2). As a “matter of cultural politics,”

Haskins reminds us to acknowledge how stamps “identify and amplify certain people and events and consign others to oblivion” (2). Connecting the work of these scholars, I argue that looking at the USPS Hispanic-themed commemorative stamp series allows us to navigate how stamps form politicized and commodified identities along the margins. In the next section of my paper, I examine how the USPS, using middlebrow multiculturalism, creates images of the palatable Hispanic subject.

### **Multiculturalism and the USPS**

The USPS has several types of common postage stamps, including definitive stamps, forever stamps, commemorative stamps, and semipostal stamps. A commemorative stamp is a first-class, forever stamp issued each year to “celebrate persons, anniversaries, and things” (Kosar). According to the Congressional Research Service, commemorative stamps generally have limited production for one year, and they are typically sought after by collectors (Kosar). The USPS has several commemorative stamp themes, including African American Subjects on United States Postage Stamps, American Indian Subjects on United States Postage Stamps, Hispanic Subjects on United States Postage Stamps, Women Subjects on United States Postage Stamps, and Christmas Holiday Stamps (“Stamps and Postcards”). With the exception of the holiday stamps, the commemorative themes reveal an effort to engage in what some might call multicultural inclusivity. Certainly, the stamp themes engage marginalized communities.

However, it is unclear what the exact function of this engagement is. The first stamp that the USPS identifies as portraying “Hispanic subjects” is the 1869 *Landing of Columbus* stamp (“Hispanic Subjects”). It is categorized as a Hispanic themed stamp

because it depicts Spanish explorers standing next to Christopher Columbus. Given that the series now highlights subjects like Julia de Burgos, who vehemently rejected a culture of colonization and imperialism, touting Spanish conquistadores and Columbus as representative of Hispanic culture is tone deaf at best. In examining the list of 75 “Hispanic-themed” stamps, there are several that celebrate the conquest. In fact, the first stamps identified as commemorative are the 16-design Columbian Exposition series released in 1893, all of which celebrate Columbus’s conquest of the “New World” (“Stamps and Postcards”). As the thematic series continues, there are several stamps which focus either on the conquest and ravage of the Americas or US imperialism in Latin America. Notably, conquest is presented as deserving of postal commemoration or celebration for a century, a fact highlighted by the issue of Columbus stamps for over 100 years. The last Columbus expedition stamp in the series was issued in 1993, well after the criteria were set forth for the CSAC. Returning to those criteria, note again that the ninth criterion states that stamp subjects commemorate “positive contributions” to American history and culture (“Stamp Selection”). Thus, an underlying theme of the Hispanic themed stamp series might be that Hispanic subjects have value only in so far as they contribute to or support the American myth of exceptionalism.

As the Hispanic-themed stamp series progressed, subjects began to shift away from images of conquest to depicting famous Hispanic individuals. Some of these subjects are beloved transnational celebrities like Desi Arnaz, Tito Puente, and Roberto Clemente. Others, like César Chávez, were selected because of their status as revolutionary heroes. Chavez provides an interesting study because he, too, is presented in an unfailingly

positive, “American” light by the Postal Service. His depiction in a USPS-sponsored pamphlet entitled *Hispanic People and Events on U.S. Postage Stamps* follows a narrative of inspired individualistic determinism used for the greater good. The brochure underlines Chávez’s “determination and hard work” as part of his legacy (Diversity Development).

In looking at these examples of commemorative stamps, one might ask what the harm is in presenting a positive articulation of Latina/o identity to offset negative representations in national and popular US culture. Certainly, there are many organizations and members of represented cultures that appreciate these thematic stamp collections as emblems that celebrate “the idea of cultural heritage that links the past to the present, and the present to the future” (Ogundiran and Smith). Notably, the Africana Studies department at University of North Carolina-Charlotte sponsored a stamp exhibit called *Blacks on Stamps* that looked at Black representation on US and international stamps. The stated objectives of the exhibition were to:

(1) showcase the relevance of stamps as a form of material culture for the study of the history of the global Black experience; (2) explore the aesthetics and artistry of stamp as a genre of representative art, especially for understanding the Africana achievements globally; and (3) use the personalities and historical issues represented on stamps to highlight some of the defining moments in national and world histories. (Ogundiran and Smith)

These objectives are significant because they convey common feelings associated with positive public representations of marginalized groups. For people of color (particularly women), who have had their identities overlaid with stereotypes, it can feel empowering to see positive representations of cultural contributions. However, when we operate

within the positive/negative binary by celebrating non-complex positive representations, too frequently we leave too little space to challenge the power structures that have created this binary. In his critical study on positive articulation of the Latina/o in the Smithsonian traveling exhibit *Americanos*, Esteban del Río makes the argument that falling into the trap of this binary also precludes our ability to engage the economic, political, and social tensions that lead us to participate in institutionally structured middlebrow multiculturalism (del Río 196).

To fully grasp this argument requires an understanding of the term middlebrow multiculturalism. In her study on public broadcasting and women's culture, Lisa Henderson argued that middlebrow multiculturalism operates "in the opposition between commerce and culture" that produces "a partial (and uneasy) synthesis of those key practices" (330). Present in Henderson's discussion of middlebrow multiculturalism are the deep concerns about this institutionally bound "structure of feeling" (329). She outlines the debate about the dangers of this form of inclusivity, noting that some have argued that middlebrow multiculturalism is a "poisonous amalgam of highbrow and low," while others, chiefly Robins and Van Wyck Brooks, argue that the middlebrow is a "more progressive condition, a 'genial middle ground' on which cultural life could thrive" (330). Extending this debate to engage the cultural constraints yielded by financial dependence on national institutions, Henderson introduced the concern that multiculturalism can quickly become "mobbish standardization, governed by pitch men ill-suited to the charge of cultural maintenance and uplift" (330). This view of institutionally funded articulations of cultural identity is at the crux of the problem. When



marginalized groups intersect financially and politically with powerful white institutions, we must question who is creating and disciplining cultural identity representations.

This question is at the core of del Río's extratextual study of *Americanos*. Drawing from an earlier study by Calafell and Delgado, del Río describes the project of *Americanos* as one which "proposes a new, generous Latinidad that can combat racist regimes of representation and fit Latina/os more easily into a national imaginary that embraces multiculturalism" (191). As with culturally thematic commemorative stamps, this project initially seems like a positive step. However, del Río investigates the noncritical lens through which US institutions approach multiculturalism and inclusion. Frequently conflating middlebrow multiculturalism, benign multiculturalism, and US liberal multiculturalism, del Río's critique about *Americanos* pins down the idea that its affirmative articulation of Latinidad centers the American dream, ascendancy, and "economic obedience" (194). Del Río is particularly concerned with the exhibit's erasure of political struggle and inequality (195). He argues:

The absence of dissent and the promotion of affirmative imagery suggest the kind of benign multiculturalism that celebrates difference without speaking to the historical and contemporary power dynamics that shape both the Latina/o experience and the conditions of living in the U.S. (196)

He connects this absence of activism to the institutional presence in the project. For del Río, the absence of complexity and struggle signals that *Americanos* is a middlebrow multicultural project. Connecting back to Henderson's definition, del Río argued that the lack of advocacy or contention in the exhibit reveal not the Latina/o participants' goals,

but rather the “non-profit institutional sensibilities” of universalism as espoused by the Smithsonian and the exhibit’s sponsor Time Warner (196).

Returning to the commemorative stamp project as issued by the USPS, a federal entity also entrenched in US ideological values of meritocracy and ascendancy, there is little surprise about the articulation of Hispanic and Latinx culture as exhibited through the Hispanic themed stamp series. Rather, its multicultural framework is very similar to that of *Americanos*. The simplistic, positive representations of Hispanics solidify what del Río describes as a “politics of representation based on hopeful imagery that strips away not language or physical differences, but the history and possibility of an oppositional project that confronts real relations of power” (196). In the next section, I discuss the role of public memory as a framework through which Burgos, and broader Latina/o/x identities, are perpetually disciplined.

### **The Problem with Public Memory**

The following passage is included in Jack Agüeros’s introduction to Julia de Burgos’s poems:

Julia de Burgos was one of those persons who burst into life like a comet sizzling through our solar system. We watch such persons with a mixture of great awe and great trepidation—we enjoy seeing the fiery aura and tail, but worry about them crashing into us, or burying us in their smoking wake.

There is no doubt they are beautiful and brilliant—but perhaps they would make us happier if they buzzed some farther planet. After they are gone—burned out—or looped out in their elliptic trajectory heading back to whence they came, our enthusiasm for them actually grows. You then meet people who didn’t see the comet, but know someone who saw it and can tell you an improbable story. While rich anecdotes rise about the comet like weeds in a field, somewhere there is a scientist who has all the solid information on the streaking star—but who knows who he is, or how to read his charts and calculations? And the truth is we prefer the anecdotes to the facts.

Julia de Burgos was one of those comets. She whirled through the Puerto Rican universe throwing off some of the best loved poems of the Puerto Rican people. And in her life and even in her death, she spun off myths and legends that are still sparkling in our culture. (v)

I include this lengthy passage here because it is a significant description not only of Burgos's legacy, but also of the process of memory. In describing Burgos, Jack Agüeros implicitly articulates a cultural, social discomfort with excess. In selecting the comet, a celestial metaphor for excess as an unpredictable entity which exists outside of the confines of a seemingly knowable planetary order, Agüeros writes of the awe associated with excess in conjunction with the fear of the crash, the smoke, the potential for devastation. He concludes this metaphor by noting that only after the threat of excess has been extinguished do we begin to appreciate it. Agüeros's metaphorical excess connects to the ways in which excess is read onto the Latina body. Specifically, José Esteban Muñoz describes *chusma* as a term for a corporeal theory of excess aimed at Latina/o/x bodies; *chusma* is a term which engages the classed, racialized, and gendered ways in which these bodies, like Burgos's, are always read as both lacking and "excessive" (182). Specifically, Muñoz argues that for minoritarian subjects, like *chusmas*, bound in and in opposition to a hegemonic society, "live performance for an audience of elites is the only imaginable mode of survival" (187). Yet this intersectional performance is often distilled into one category of being. In terms of the Latina body, Jillian Hernandez notes that sexual excess is always already read onto the Latina/o body, particularly if women are from poorer classes. As noted in the previous chapter, this has certainly been the case with Burgos.

In examining a flagrantly excessive figure such as Burgos, the role of memory becomes one of containment. In essence, the threatening subject becomes contained in memory, and only then does it become wholly desirable. Once contained, the memory is malleable, and we begin to mythologize the subject in myriad ways (Arroyo 129). In its containment, Agüeros argues, we begin to account for the subject outside of the bounds of “truth,” preferring “anecdotes to the facts” (v). For subjects like Julia de Burgos, individuals that have always been read as excessive by colonial systems of power, perhaps local narratives and myths that operate within a space of perceived excess, outside the limits of Western objectivity, are preferable forms of remembrance. Yet, as we continually see in state-sponsored museums and other public memory projects, unsanctioned performative engagements with the memory of a subject are diluted in favor of the calculated nature of textual multiculturalism.

The notion of textuality is at the crux of privileging many public memory projects which hinge upon flat multicultural narratives. As performance scholar Dwight Conquergood argues, textuality is the critical moment a memory is fixed, or flattened, through inscription (31). Drawing from Edward Said, Conquergood notes that textuality is rooted in the notion of authority (27). The flattened nature of textual public memory, then, is privileged precisely because its immovability is an appeal to authority. As Conquergood notes, one who privileges “textual inscription aims to rescue meaning from perishable events, make it a perusable, inspectable, (and therefore respectable) form of knowledge, distilled from situational contingencies” (31). What is lost in this politics of memory distillation are the very people whose bodies have always already been read as

outside the realm of respectable. How can a person like Julia de Burgos, branded as excessive in numerous ways by an imperialistic state and colonial patriarchy, be contained in typical public memory projects?

Memory scholar Stephen Legg's work complements this conclusion as he engages memory as springing from an intellectual tradition that privileges some forms of remembrance over others. Echoing claims similar to performance scholar Dwight Conquergood about the bias toward textuality, or dictation in Legg's terms, Legg argues that "we have inherited ways of thinking about memory and forgetting that are themselves recollections of previous intellectual formations" (456). He continues by emphasizing the binaries that "work to exclude and forget certain forms of remembrance while championing and embellishing other people, events, and places" (456). It is Legg's insistence on the binary of memory that renders his review essay significant in my study. Legg begins with the deconstruction of these binaries as he traces the history of memory studies. Legg cites a variety of scholars who note, significantly, that memory cannot be "dictated" (459). While many scholars in rhetoric and various other disciplines engage the constructed nature of memory, Legg clearly articulates that while institutional narratives might craft public remembrance of an event, person, or era, there are many rival interpretations to this space. Legg calls on counterdiscourses as those which have the ability to "resituate perception and restore emphasis to excluded peoples and perspectives" (460). Rather, these discourses are active rejections of narratives that would exclude or deemphasize; Legg cites Richard Terdiman, writing "although memory sustains hegemony, it also subverts it through its capacity to recollect and to restore the

alternative discourses the dominant would simply bleach out and forget. Memory, then, is inherently contestatory” (qtd. in Legg, 460).

As many rhetoric scholars note, there is an inherent connection between memory and national identity. Where Raento and Braun note the connections between circulating cultural memorabilia and identity construction, memory scholars beginning with Pierre Nora have identified the role of memory in crafting a national identity. Kendall Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes acknowledge the state’s role in the reciprocal relationship between memory and identity construction; they write “Our memory practices, especially official practices, are largely tied to the broader narrative of the nation state” (3) Yet, while we understand the role of the state in perpetuating specific narratives, we have yet to fully attend to the ways in which the state uses public memory to erase or diminish its violent conquest and perpetual domination of the colonized.

One memory scholar who does attempt to take up the problematic role of the state is Stephen A. King. King’s work seeks to fill the void in public memory scholarship by accounting for notions of “authenticity” in institutionalized narratives. He argues that the memory work at play in museums is an act of privileging these narratives. His case study is the white cooptation of blues heritage in the Mississippi delta, and he examines cooptation-turned-marketing ploy via the Delta Blues Museum by examining two key rhetorical strategies: 1) “narratives and visual tropes of poverty and primitiveness;” 2) the utilization of a “static historical object belonging to some bygone era” to construct notions of authenticity (237). King details the racism that is at the root of this grasp for “authenticity” in his case study. He traces the Delta Blues Museum’s insistence on a

narrative of a “rural, untamed” Delta blues scene to the racist mythology of primitive, impoverished, and emotional Black populations in the South (241). King goes on to detail how this mythology sprang out of white refusal to address systemic inequalities. King makes the significant point that while poverty was not uncommon among blues artists, these racist myths persist in the curators’ continued practice of “linking authenticity of the blues to primitiveness” (242). King concludes that these practices serve to “racially reinscribe predictable and stereotypical images of the downtrodden, dispossessed blues subject” (248).

Given the significant role that colonization has played in shaping identities in Puerto Rico, as well as the United States’ continued imperialistic approach in refusing to allow the people of Puerto Rico autonomy, my project examines the interplay between the primitive and the static as it relates to institutionalized memory creation. Within his essay, King outlines the clearly value-laden political and cultural decisions that shape museums and exhibitions, and he reiterates the point that “public or collective memory serves as the intersecting point between institutional forces (e.g., curators) and the public” (239). King is particularly aware of the fragmented nature within public memory sites, and he writes, “museums feature selected fragments from the past, and thus are divested of the complexities of history” (241). Citing Tamar Katriel, King argues that “heritage museums, in particular, are ‘cultural enclaves whose aura of timeless stability stands in sharp contrast to a world marked by an ethos of change’” (qtd. in King 237). King elaborates later that there is a link between the static and the primitive as a means of rhetorically crafting authenticity; he notes that Western-marketed notions of the Other

represent indigenous populations as “static, passive, primitive, exotic, and above all, authentic” (241).

It is the notion of the static in multicultural public memory projects that I want to investigate here. Burgos was a woman whose life and writing revealed revolutionary, dynamic participation in her quest for personal and national liberation. Yet, as middlebrow multiculturalism meets public commemoration, Burgos’s identity becomes melded into an assimilatory, stereotypical narrative of ascendancy. Moreover, it erases the violence of US imperialism, recasting the state as a benevolent background character. This process is evident in the USPS Burgos stamp.

### **Burgos in the Public Frame**

Designed by Canadian artist Jody Hewgill, the Julia de Burgos commemorative stamp is a landscape-oriented stamp that prominently features an up-close depiction of a woman’s face as she stands in front of a river. Her face comprises almost half of the right side of the picture. She is gazing past her viewer, looking to the left. Neither her eyes nor her mouth reveal a smile; rather, her expression might be described as determined. The woman’s dark eyes are wide set, but small, and her eyebrows are thinly painted straight, brown lines. Her nose is long and equine, set over bright red lips. Her hair is depicted as pulled away from her face, parted down the middle. She is wearing a dark blouse that is only slightly visible above the edge of the stamp, and she is also adorned with a gold chain. Her appearance is neither attractive nor unattractive, and there is a slight masculinity in her features. Behind her, the blue river is painted as flowing with white crests and deeper blue colors to indicate troughs. To the woman’s left, there is a palm tree



painted behind her, though in closer proximity to her body than the river. On the far side of the river, painted as distant, there are green hills and three small, dark green palm trees. Superimposed over the top of the picture in yellow block lettering is the name: JULIA DE BURGOS. In the lower right-hand corner, the postage amount, 44 cents, is written in white. Without additional context for the stamp, one cannot attach a specific heritage or culture to Burgos, though one can seemingly situate her in a tropical setting depicted by the palm trees. Thus, I turn to the stamp's accompanying USPS press release for more context.

The dedication of the Julia de Burgos stamp was celebrated with a ceremony in Teatro Tapia in San Juan, Puerto Rico on September 14, 2010. Presiding over the ceremony was master of ceremonies and Puerto Rican journalist Byankah Sobá. The mayor of San Juan, Jorge Santini-Padilla, and Julia de Burgos's niece, María Consuelo Sáez Burgos, were also in attendance. Jordan Small, the Northeast Postal Service area president, attended as the representative of the USPS. There is little in English-speaking media about the ceremony save for the USPS press release, and its subsequent circulation, as issued by Darlene Suárez Casey.

The press release provides scant details on the dedication ceremony, highlighting only those in attendance and a fragment of Small's speech included at the outset of this chapter. This fragment is followed by a short biographical sketch of Burgos's life and works. The USPS narrative of Burgos is initially framed as one of ascendancy. In detailing her childhood, the press release focuses on her ability to overcome her poverty, stating: "Although her family's limited means made attending college difficult, Burgos

persevered and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico in 1933 with a two-year teaching degree” (Suarez Casey). Within the USPS narrative, this perseverance is immediately rewarded as the press release introduces Burgos’s first poetry collection, with emphasis on her famous poem “Río Grande de Loíza.” The press release then briefly mentions Burgos’s poetic rejection of “the social and behavioral restrictions placed on women,” skimming over her other poems that dealt with “political themes such as equality and social justice” (Suarez Casey).

Despite the turmoil surrounding Burgos as the result of an affair and her self-exile from Puerto Rico due to the patriarchal rules of the Nationalist party and her own anti-United States politics, the USPS version of this story does not deviate from the ascendancy myth. Their narrative simply states Burgos

left Puerto Rico in 1940 for New York City, then moved to Cuba, where she stayed until 1942. From 1944 to 1945, she served as an editor for *Pueblos Hispanos*, a New York-based newspaper that promoted many progressive social and political causes including Puerto Rican independence. In 1946, she received another literary award, this time for her essay, ‘To be or Not To Be is the Motto.’ (Suarez Casey)

There is no mention in the press release that *Pueblos Hispanos* was a socialist magazine, or that Burgos’s contributions were also socialist and deeply anti-United States. In fact, the essay noted in the press release was highly critical of the colonial and imperial relationships the US maintained with Puerto Rico and other Latin American nations. As noted above, Burgos’s poetry and prose continually argued for Puerto Rican independence, calling on international support for this cause and critiquing the US for abandoning its democratic values. Burgos also used her editorial position to connect

immigrants in New York to news from Latin American countries as a move to prevent US-encouraged cultural amnesia.

As Agüeros and Pérez Rosario have written, Burgos's death is integral to her mythic status among Puerto Ricans, particularly those who have moved to the United States. However, the seeming tragedy of her death does not work with the USPS narrative of ascendancy. Thus, the press release concludes with only a brief mention of poems that "describe the loneliness and isolation she experienced in New York City" (Suarez Casey). Yet, they turn this mention into advice for immigrants to understand "the importance of community and solidarity" (Suarez Casey). Even her death is glossed over as "health problems," though she receives a posthumous happy ending as her "friends and family ensured her final resting place was her beloved Carolina, Puerto Rico" (Suarez Casey).

The presence of Burgos's family members and prominent Puerto Rican figures at the ceremony imply the collaboration of Burgos advocates with the USPS. Thus, this sanitized version of Burgos's life is in keeping with the goals of middlebrow multiculturalism as outlined by del Río. The stamp, and the overall series, particularly as articulated in the last 20 years, demonstrate similar goals as the *Americanos* exhibit. The framing of Burgos's tragic story as a narrative of ascendancy and success fits within the public memory framework for institutionalized liberal multiculturalism and its interest in "creating mobility narratives supportive of the American dream" (del Río 191). Glossing over Burgos's vehement opposition to US imperialism and oppression as a "political cause" or "political theme of equality" is a common function of middlebrow

multiculturalism (195). Thus, the move to “celebrate” Burgos, and by extension the Hispanic subject, without critically illuminating the contentious power struggles at play in her life results in what del Río terms another “benign project” of multiculturalism (195). Even as it leaves the power institution (the USPS) feeling as though it has contributed to inclusivity and may even leave some Hispanic and Latina/o/x subjects feeling represented and included, in truth, the project has done nothing but reify flat positive/negative binaries of difference and exceptionalism.

Moreover, public memory projects like the USPS commemorative Julia de Burgos stamp work under the guise of multicultural inclusion to sanitize and erase state-sponsored oppression and violence. In the case of Burgos, a woman subject to the silence, shame, and erasure inherent in US imperialism and the patriarchal colonial nostalgia embedded in her contemporary Puerto Rican resistance movement, these types of public commemoration projects also function as a process of coloniality. By building a narrative of remembrance of Burgos along the ideals of the predominant Anglo-centric US culture, the USPS utilizes memory to uphold a system rooted in its own supremacy. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Anabel Quijano argues that coloniality is powerful precisely because it invades us at the level of our imagination (169). Thus, when state-sponsored narratives inculcate the memory of resistive anti-colonial figures like Burgos with placid “American” traits, the narrative, particularly for the colonized observer, “acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it” (169). As Frantz Fanon and Quijano both observe in their writings, coloniality builds upon its established mission to render Euro-centric values and knowledge as universal aspirations (Fanon *Wretched*,

708-711; Quijano 169). Therefore, figures like Burgos, who vocally and materially challenged their subjugation and oppression in life, are always already positioned to have their influence coopted through processes of coloniality.

### **Moving Beyond Containment**

As noted in this chapter, Burgos's poetry illustrates that she was highly cognizant of the ways in which the United States used violence and coloniality of power to subjugate Puerto Ricans. There is a consistent theme of documenting the deaths of Puerto Rican martyrs in Burgos's poetry; these poems frequently end with a call for armed revolution against imperialism. This common theme in her poetry suggests Burgos's cognizance of the role of history and memory in both upholding and overthrowing oppressive power systems. As I document here and in the next chapter, Burgos uses memory to bear witness to and resist US imperialism and the legacy of colonialism. As I transition to Chapter 4, I more closely examine Burgos's resistance through a poetic form of autoethnographic persona. By turning to the role of embodiment in memory construction, I argue that negotiating her positionalities as a poor, mixed raced woman living outside of sexual and relational norms, Burgos uses her writing to craft resistive memories of a still-colonized Puerto Rico. I particularly focus on the way in which she bears witness to the role of women who both operate within and are expelled from normative power structures in Puerto Rico. I argue that by critically interrogating her intersecting positionalities, Burgos counters the powerful influence of coloniality by developing her own decolonial imaginary of possibility.

## Chapter 4: Memory, the Body, and Liberation

In the introduction to his translation of Burgos's poems, Jack Agüeros describes the first time he saw Julia de Burgos in East Harlem:

Suddenly, a group of four or five men came around the corner and with them there was a woman. The men were all ruddy and disheveled. They spoke and laughed loudly and you could see several pints of rum or wine among them... In the midst of the five men there was a woman. A tall woman, as tall as the tallest man, and taller than several of them. As the animated band walked by, my friend straightened up and watched them intensely. When they had passed, he asked me, 'Do you know who that woman was?' I said 'no,' expecting him to crack some joke. But he remained very serious and looking after the swaying chattering group said, 'That was Julia de Burgos, Puerto Rico's most famous poet.' I looked at him for signs that he was kidding, but he was dead serious. Then he looked at me and said 'You have to be careful drinking.' (iii)

In this memory, Burgos is described as excessive in several ways. First, the implication in the friend's warning is that Burgos's promise as a poet (and perhaps as a woman) has been ruined by excessive drinking. Second, Agüeros comments on her height. She is not only tall, she is "as tall as the tallest man, and taller than several of them" (iii). Thus, her body is also described in terms of excess. As the preeminent Burgos historian for several decades, it is notable that as Agüeros challenges the myths and legends surrounding Burgos, he frequently describes her in terms of her physical stature. Later in his introductory biography, he again notes that she grew "tall and athletic" (xi). As he laments his inability to track down concrete details about the more mythic elements of her life, he writes that a "a copy of her passport would make me happy, too, for it would

have her height and weight and other details” (xxiii). He contents himself with second hand descriptions, those which affirm his own memory of her physical excess. He includes descriptions of her as “an extraordinary presence...Julia always seemed to me taller than she really was” (xxv), and as “tall, inharmonic: long and thin legs, slim hips, wide shoulders, well proportioned breasts high and firm” (xxv).

I include these descriptions because, as Agüeros notes, Burgos’s physical excess becomes part of the many myths surrounding her life. In one particularly gruesome legend, Burgos was so tall that when her unidentified body was found on the streets of Harlem, “they had to amputate her legs in order to fit her into the standard City coffin” (xxxv). Even as he fixates on her height, Agüeros ponders the origination of this story. Here, I turn to another description of Burgos. Juan Antonio Corretjer described her thusly:

She is tall, taller than is common for our land. A resonance of indigenous blood endows in mysterious silenced clamors the light of her eyes. The creole sun bronzes her skin in smooth distances of sapodilla, and Visigothic traces thread, in the dark mass of her hair, golden lines (qtd. in Agüeros xxv).

While Corretjer’s description also notes Burgos’s height, clearly in terms of exceeding the normative, he also describes her body in terms of indigeneity and racial hybridity, which is noted in terms of mystery and distance.

In reading this description of Burgos against the ways in which nonwhite Puerto Rican women’s bodies were/are read as excessive, the dismemberment legend takes on greater significance. Where the USPS public commemoration served to contain Burgos’s legacy of anti-colonial resistance through multiculturalism and narrative, this tale of

dismemberment functions as a vernacular containment of Burgos's embodied excess. Indeed, Burgos historian Vanessa Pérez Rosario notes her own hesitancy to even mention the verifiable circumstances of Burgos's death because it entrenches the "narratives of victimhood that have shrouded her life for more than half a century" (*Becoming Julia* 1). Yet, while Pérez Rosario notes the significance of Burgos's death on the streets of Harlem in capturing the imagination of readers, I build from Jossiana Arroyo's argument that this fixation on Burgos's person comes from "a desire to possess her image and body" ("Living the Political" 133). The vivid resonance of the myth of her dismemberment is another example of colonial containment of Burgos's excess.

As I read Burgos's poetry to understand how she negotiates this containment, I focus on her poems related to the body or her positionality as a Puertorriqueña. Within these poems, there is a consistent critical theme wherein Burgos the narrator realizes her body cannot exist under the strictures of either US imperialism, *or* the staunch colonial patriarchy of the Puerto Rican *treintista* resistance. Thus, in this chapter, I argue that Julia de Burgos uses poetry as a resistive rhetoric in which she constitutes a vision for the Puerto Rican woman outside of the bounds of either the state or the Nationalist resistance movement. Importantly, Burgos articulates memory in a distinct way. Counter to the unquestioned, maternal role of women as dictated by the *treintista* literary elite, Burgos rejects these norms to negotiate a decolonial memory of Puerto Rican womanhood beyond a Spanish-influenced patriarchy or classed, raced, and gendered US sanctions on Puerto Rican bodies. As I outline in my analysis below, Burgos was unafraid of disrupting expectations by both challenging binaries and offering a vision of something



beyond. She does this within her poetry by giving voice to that which is expected to be silenced and by constructing embodied forms of (new) memory. In this way, Burgos creates a decolonial imaginary where women like her are able to exist outside of the colonial/imperial strictures placed upon them. In her poems, Burgos's memory manifests through embodied auto-representation, which allows her to critique and transform the colonized perceptions of her bodily excess. Rather than existing in colonial containment, Burgos uses the body to transcend. Thus, by reading Burgos's embodied memory through this frame, we can more fully understand the ways in which memory can function as radical rhetoric.

To build this argument, I have divided this chapter into the following five sections. First, I briefly outline the ways in which colonization has impacted how Eurocentric notions of history and knowledge are constructed as normative. This is critical to understanding the entrenched world system Burgos occupied. Next, I examine writing as a resistive act. I build from a broad foundation before focusing on the role of poetry specifically. In the third section, I draw from interdisciplinary scholars and writers to theorize embodied memory. Next, in my analysis section, I analyze how Burgos negotiates "phallogentric desire in homogenous nation-making" by utilizing auto-representation through a communal "I" persona (Aldama 118). This is particularly evident in her poetry as she conveys how her embodied positionalities can never conform to her socially imposed roles. I conclude this chapter by arguing that Burgos provides a resistive model for memory negotiation by engaging the decolonial imaginary.

## **Colonized Knowledge**

Writing during a time of revolution, Aime Césaire was an immediate predecessor and peer to psychologist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon. Like Fanon, Césaire’s work engages colonialism and colonization during the period of political decolonization through revolution. Within *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire discusses the dehumanizing aspects of colonization, and he creates a careful distinction between colonization and what he describes as civilization. Decrying Europe as “indefensible,” Césaire describes how Europe has created “the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem” through continued colonization (31-32). Césaire describes colonization as the “thingification” of the colonized which creates divergent paths wherein the colonizer maintains a dominant position over the colonized indigenous person, who becomes merely an “instrument of production” (42). Césaire condemns all who profit from colonization, and he argues that it is a systemic issue which has now expanded “to a world scale the competition of its antagonist economies” (33). He also clearly articulates that the motive for colonization is never done innocently or with pure intentions; rather, he writes,

That a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly progressing from one consequence to another, one denial to another, calls for its Hitler. (39-40)

He sums up the endeavor succinctly: “Colonization: bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism” (39-40); Césaire is clear to note that the barbarism occurs on the side of the colonizer.

While Césaire's work lays a foundation for understanding the barbarity of circumstances for those subjected to colonialism and colonization, Frantz Fanon's writing expounds on the psychological and physical trauma that this violence inflicts on the colonized, writing specifically about French-occupied Algeria. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon outlines that French colonialism "has wanted nothing other than to break the will of the people, to destroy its resistance, to liquidates its hopes" (120). Fanon writes that the tactic they use to accomplish this is "separating the people from each other, of fragmenting them, with the sole objective of making any cohesion impossible" (119). In Fanon's observation, the only response to this extreme repression and isolation is to reject and overthrow colonialism through a process of wholesale decolonization. He writes that decolonization must happen on every level because if opposition is qualified, "every qualification is perceived by the occupier as an invitation to perpetrate the oppression" (122). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes the problem of colonization as that which "comprises not only the intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man's attitude toward these conditions" (65). Understanding how these attitudes are shaped becomes part of Fanon's project, as well as that of other decolonization scholars.

As a writer and important critical voice in Mexican cultural studies, Rosario Castellaños specifically identified language as a crucial space of colonization. Speaking from a Latin American context, she explains, "When the Hispanist attempts to justify the conquest of America..., he reminds us that, among its positive aspects, the arrival of the discoverers to our continent reduced the diversity of dialects of the pre-Columbian tribes to the unity of the Spanish language" (73). For Castellaños, language serves as another

way to differentiate and Other, “The color of one’s skin said a lot but not everything; one had to add the purity and antiquity of faith and something else: the command of the oral means of expression” (74). Moreover, Castellanos notes that as language becomes a way to distinguish between colonizer and colonized, the colonizer’s language becomes desirable: “Here the word is not an instrument of intelligence or the storehouse of memory but rather the ‘fair covering’ with which terror of the void is appeased, a talisman to ward off anguish” (75). Thus, within Castellanos’s writing, we see the domination of language within the colonial context.

Fanon also engages the power of language in oppressive systems in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon argues, “A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language” (2). Continuing by stating that “there is an extraordinary power in the possession of a language” (2), Fanon examines how language works to control the colonized. He states, “All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture” (2). Fanon discusses the importance of assimilation in a colonized culture as he contends that through assimilation with the cultural values of the metropolis, the colonized “rejects his blackness and the bush, [and] the whiter he will become” (2). As an example, Fanon provides the native officers who serve as interpreters in the colonial army, a position that though absent of any autonomy or authority carries “a certain status” (3). Moreover, Fanon argues that language is tied to stereotypes of blackness and “that the black man has to be portrayed in

a certain way” (18). In colonized culture, he writes, the black man “has no culture, no civilization, and no ‘long historical past’” (17). He continues by noting that the only history allowed him is one “the white man has fabricated for him,” which in Fanon’s time was usually that of a docile servant who speaks “pidgin” (17-18). Fanon argues that this stereotyping of language through the constant representation of a black man speaking pidgin is “tying him to an image, snaring him, imprisoning him as the eternal victim of his own essence, of visible appearance for which he is not responsible” (18). This echoes Castellanos’s argument that language and race are inherently connected in colonial systems of oppression. In this particular scenario, the only “escape” is assimilation, as Fanon notes, “there is nothing more sensational than a black man speaking correctly, for he is appropriating the white world” (19).

The emphasis on domination within language is but one aspect where colonization manipulates and creates universal systems of ontology and epistemology. In his later work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon notes that colonization is an all-encompassing project that manifests through control of language, knowledge, and values. Fanon writes, “When the colonialist bourgeoisie realizes it is impossible to maintain its domination over the colonies it decides to wage a rearguard campaign in the fields of culture, values, and technology, etc.” (700-711). Fanon explains how this is inculcated in the colonized through “history”:

The colonist makes history and he knows it. And because he refers constantly to the history of his metropolis, he plainly indicates that here he is the extension of this metropolis. The history he writes is therefore not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation's looting, raping, and starving to death. The immobility to which the colonized subject is condemned can be challenged only

if he decides to put an end to the history of colonization and the history of despoliation in order to bring to life the history of the nation, the history of decolonization. (776-780)

In the final sentence, it is clear that while Fanon believes in the pervasiveness of colonial influence, this Westernized influence is not permanent. He argues that this influence is largely engaged solely by elite colonized populations, and that “the immense majority of colonized people are impervious to such issues” (700-711). Even the elite, Fanon contends, can break from this influence during a struggle for liberation when they are reconnected to their fellow colonized people (700-711). During this struggle, Fanon states that the “colonized intellectual” will see infiltration for what it is:

All the Mediterranean values, the triumph of the individual, of enlightenment and Beauty turn into pale lifeless trinkets. All those discourses appear a jumble of dead words. Those values which seemed to enoble the soul prove worthless because they have nothing in common with the real-life struggle in which people are engaged. (729-733)

For Fanon, this struggle results in a destruction/rebirth for the elite wherein the “colonial intellectual, pulverized by colonialist culture, will also discover the strength of the village assemblies, the power of the people’s commissions...personal interests are now the collective interest” (737). Thus, the colonialist intellectual, bereft of the influence of colonized systems of knowledge, history, and language, must embrace a new way of knowing and being.

For Castellaños, language is key in dismantling oppression, though like Fanon, she claims that this dismantling cannot begin with the language of the colonizer. Castellaños rejects colonizers as the “usufructors of language,” noting that they have “perverted” and “sacked” it over centuries (75). She continues, “That treasure is irrecoverable. We have to

create another language, we have to find another starting point, search for the pearl within each shell, the pit beneath the peel” (75-76). Moreover, Castellanos argues that language and meaning carry weighty responsibility:

Words have been endowed with meaning and a person who handles them professionally is not permitted to strip them of that meaning but, on the contrary, promises to bear witness to it to make it evident at every moment. The meaning of a word is its addressee: the other being who hears it, understands it, and who, when he answers, converts his questioner into a listener and understander, establishing in the way the relationship of dialogue that is only possible between beings who consider themselves and deal with each other as equals. And that is only fruitful between those who wish to be free. (76-77)

Here, Castellanos envisions a language of liberation and equality, one which the colonized must create outside of the context of coloniality. Yet, given the pervasiveness of coloniality of power, constructing this language is no easy task. Thus, in the next section, I examine how women writers, writing from within colonial power structures, use language to construct worlds and communities outside of coloniality.

### **Creating a Language of Liberation**

¡Tú! ¡Verso!  
Has vuelto a la vibrante definición de forma  
que entibiaste a la sombra del impulse primero.

Y puedo definirte. Traes ímpetu de idea,  
y vibra en tus palabras el ritmo de lo nuevo.

Eres el hoy del mundo; la afirmación; la fuerza.  
¡Revolución que rompe las cortinas del tiempo!

En tu Sí, inevitable revolución del mundo,  
me he encontrado yo misma al encontrar mi verso.

[You! Verse!  
You have returned to the vibrant definition of form  
that you warmed in the shadow of the prime impulse.

Now I can define you. You bring an impetus of idea  
in your words the rhythm of the new vibrates.

You are the world's today; the affirmation; the strength.  
Revolutions which shatters the curtains of time!

In your Yes, inevitable world revolution,  
I have found myself, upon finding my verse]. (Burgos 18-19)

In these last four stanzas of her poem “Se me ha perdido un verso” [“I Have Lost a Verse”], Julia de Burgos describes her poetry in fluid, anthropomorphized terms that move between a pre-verbalized primal impulse to formal definition. Within this dynamic motion, Burgos reads verse as revolutionary, essential to both disrupting the claims of time as well as giving her a voice and an identity. Here, we begin to see how Burgos claims poetry as a language of liberation. Yet, as I begin to make these claims, I seek to avoid the continuation of scholarly trends which entrench Anglo feminist values. To this end, I frame this section by first taking heed of the work of the Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective. The collective situates their work in that of decolonial philosopher María Lugones, noting how Lugones “utilizes women of color feminist thought to critique the universalism of knowledge-formations and to theorize an intersectional and intersubjective, decolonial analysis” (24). The collective also engages incommensurability and the decolonial imaginary, and they acknowledge that while they cannot completely “comprehend our subaltern subjects,” women of color feminisms provide a way to make “the intangible visible through vigilance of hierarchical systems of domination and imposed silences due to racism and heteropatriarchy” (25). The



collective is particularly invested in intersectionality, but they are careful to note how the term is frequently reduced to a mantra of “raceclassgender” (32). The collective resituates the term within women of color feminist activist scholarship, and they contend that it is necessary to critique feminist universalism (33). Again, citing Lugones, they argue that intersectionality is a space to identify the absence, and ““to see non-white women is to exceed ‘categorical’ logic”” (33). Additionally, they call for maintaining the genealogies of intersectionality to avoid further erasure of “subaltern histories and praxis” (33). At their core, then, women of color intersectional feminisms work to analyze “systemic violence through the positioning of those historically pushed to social, political, economic, sexual, and racial margins” (33). Therefore, just as I work to situate my reading of Burgos within her own contexts, below I make a concerted effort to draw from scholars and writers who are cognizant of the intersectional matrix of oppressive colonial constructs under which Burgos was writing.

### **Writing as Resistance**

In Gloria Anzaldúa’s letter to Third World women writers, she counters the ways in which their/our voices are typically silenced or marginalized by claiming the act of writing as one of survival. Reverberating the embodied impulse to write as articulated by Burgos, Anzaldúa asks: “Why am I compelled to write?” (“Speaking in Tongues” 168). She answers: “Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive” (168-169). For Anzaldúa, this personal salvation comes through language because it allows her to “put order” in a world where “others erase when I speak” (169). Writing, in these terms, is an act of correcting narratives in which women like Anzaldúa

and Burgos are erased; it is an act of creation to place oneself into the story and construct an identity. Anzaldúa writes “to discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy” (169). Yet this act is not entirely self-serving; it is done in the service of community as Anzaldúa also writes to create an intimacy between herself (and her experience) and her reader as “Others” who have “internalized this exile” (169). As Anzaldúa argues “Forever after we have been in search of that self, that ‘other’ and each other,” she also claims “writing is a tool for piercing that mystery but it also shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive. And those that don’t survive? The waste of ourselves: so much meat thrown at the feet of madness or fate or the state” (169). Thus, the act of writing for women of color is a way to both reconcile Otherness while also creating enough distance within our self-reflexive quest to survive the outcome.

Interrogating the function of the state in constructing this Otherness, literary scholar Elizabeth Marchant explains the role of nation-building in the erasure and marginalization of women of color writers. Marchant claims the act of writing has often been a way for women, particularly those in the context of the Global South, to “intervene in the public realm” (1). Importantly, Marchant draws clear lines between nation-building, literary contributions, cultural construction through literary contributions, and gender. She highlights trends wherein those texts marked as ‘masculine’ are typically read as “national works” of “broad interest” (7-8). By contrast, when “marked as ‘feminine,’ women’s writing as a whole is traditionally understood as personal and is therefore not of public significance” (8). Marchant continues to critique the traditional gendered binary approach to literature wherein masculine discourse is

“representative of the nation, and writings by women are excluded,” or “deemed inferior” and relegated to a role of private and personal (7-8). Yet, while Marchant argues for greater interrogation of these roles, she too cautions that we remember the limitations of approaching this type of analysis from the lens of Eurocentric feminism. Specifically, Marchant notes the inadequacy of this lens because of its failure to understand oppression intersectionally; she writes that traditional “feminist theories are inadequate for dealing with how race and class oppression affect women’s lives within and outside the borders of First World nations” (9). Moreover, she is concerned with the ways in which what she terms First World feminism ignores the collapsible nature of public and private because the binary is “most relevant for middle- and upper-class white women” who do not acknowledge or address those women who “do not live under the economic conditions that generate the public/private discussion” (9).

Thus, for more specific context as I explore resistance in Burgos’s poetry, I intentionally engage Carmen S. Rivera and her work on Puerto Rican women writers. Rivera notes the importance of orality for Latina women, writing that it is a “weapon of liberation” (159). In direct contrast to the traditionally inscribed roles of gendered discourse as noted above, Rivera writes, “Latina writers question and subvert traditional gender and cultural roles; they denounce and attack the constricting parameters of the proper female behavior; they name and validate themselves; and they initiate themselves as ‘keepers of the past’” (159). Indeed, Rivera’s project examines how Puertorriqueñas contest how their experience has been ignored or overlooked by writing “themselves literally into history” (xi). In her concluding chapter, Rivera’s identifies a through line

between Puertorriqueña authors as she finds “writing is not a choice, but an urgent need” (149). In describing this imperative for these women, Rivera again turns to the metaphor of arming oneself:

Writing becomes the tool, the weapon, the magic wand enabling them to authorize themselves in the literary tradition that up until the second half of the twentieth century denied them access. It is through writing that these women can create a space of their own, can rescue themselves from the borderlands of literary canons and stand at the epicenter of their own imaginary community. They will use any means to give expression to their voices, muted for so long. (149)

Rather than working along the lines of a single binary as we often see in white feminist approaches as outlined by Marchant, Rivera’s analysis of Puertorriqueña authors reveals something distinct. Within these literary discourses, Rivera concludes that these authors are not concerned about gaining access or entrance to a masculine public sphere. These women use writing to construct and create new spaces, communities, and imaginaries—indeed, new languages where they are able to exist.

As a field, rhetorical studies has largely ignored these discourses, with little to no attention on the existence or erasure of Puertorriqueña rhetoric. Yet, within this gap, rhetorician Lisa Corrigan has examined the ways in which many Caribbean intellectuals have “been relentlessly interrogating their relationship to the domination of the West through cultural productions like histories, autobiographies, novels, poetry, music, and drama” (62). Her work examines how Cuban dissidents use writing as a form of prison resistance, and she uses “guerilla pedagogy” as a foundational framework for her study. Within the essay, she notes how this pedagogy “utilizes propaganda, armed resistance, and most importantly, narrative” to provide insight into oppressive power systems (64).

Corrigan writes that Cuban dissident Ana Rodríguez's resistance narrative is a call to readers to engage and "reflect on the process of history itself and the ways in which it erases guerilla women" (76). This claim is significant because it emphasizes the reader's responsibility to function as a witness to both depictions of regime violence and to the state-sponsored erasure of women and their roles. Corrigan notes the lens of romantic nationalism through which Cuban women fighters are typically depicted; she argues that these images of martyr warriors "preserve the masculinist tyranny of the island" and that they ultimately harm women (77).

Though the connection between Corrigan's project and mine is largely one of regional/historical proximity, Corrigan's claims about these narratives as resistance against "official rhetorical history" carry value when analyzing the poetry of Caribbean anti-imperialists like Burgos (62). Burgos's anti-imperialism narrative is spun throughout her poetry, and in it, she bears witness to the violence wrought against Puerto Rican people by the United States as well as to the preservation of patriarchal supremacy in Puerto Rican nationalism. While the male *treintistas* of Burgos's era were prepared to fight against the imperialism of the United States, they did so from a nostalgic framework that revered the *jíbaro* peasant from early Spanish colonialism. Their narratives revealed a preoccupation, or a preference, really, for Spanish colonialism in the wake of imperial rule (Pérez Rosario *Becoming Julia*; López Springfield). Inherent in this preferred vision of Puerto Rico is the woman as deferential mother, caring and supportive of the needs of men rather than functioning as active agents for independence. Moreover, much of the *treintista* writing was delivered through the novel. Thus, as I argue below, Burgos

utilized poetry as a resistive form in multiple ways to construct a new collective imaginary for marginalized Puerto Rican women.

### **Poetry as Resistive Rhetoric**

As a rhetorical form, poetry has a unique political and resistive function. Jossiana Arroyo notes, the poetic “serves as an axis enabling the political to appear in critical dimensions” (“Living the Political” 130). Despite this function, Jeffrey St. Onge and Jennifer Moore have noted that within the broad spectrum of rhetorical examinations of dissent and protest across multiple platforms, there has been little disciplinary focus on the way in which poetry operates as dissent (336). These scholars claim poetry is “a unique and crucial component of democratic culture” and that it offers a “distinctive way of advancing an argument, attitude or perspective that could function as a corrective to troubling patterns of discourse and thought” (337). Yet, while St. Onge and Moore claim the study of poetry as an essential form for “valuable democratic dissent through its ability to perform a metacritique on norms of discourse” (337), I am interested in how poetry is used as a critical resistive rhetoric for those who are denied access to or are silenced in democratic forums.

Rhetoricians Richard Jensen and John Hammerback move closer to this type of analysis as they examine the ways in which Chicano leader Rodolfo ‘Corky’ González thematically crafted revolution within his poetry; importantly, they cite González’s claim: “‘There is no inspiration without identifiable images, there is no conscience without the sharp knife of truthful exposure, and ultimately, there are no revolutions without poets’” (qtd. in Jensen and Hammerback 76). Preceding Jensen and Hammerback, Michael

Sedano's work also documents the rhetorical role of poetry and its relationship to a the "rise of Chicano political militancy" (178). In analyzing a broad sampling of resistive Chicano poetry, Sedano outlines how four general themes (the movement, the barrio, the Anglo world, and Chicanismo) are invoked through attending images and contexts, and these themes allow Chicano poets to constitute a collective Chicano identity (178). Sedano argues that poetry is used to define identity through the Chicano resistance movement; he writes, "protest and change are seen as the basis of identity and a part of everyday existence for their Chicano audience" (181).

However, even as scholars like Jensen, Hammerback, and Sedano have sought to address the dearth of poetic resistance analysis in rhetorical studies through Chicano contexts, their subjects often echo the patriarchal nostalgia of Julia de Burgos's *treintista* contemporaries. Thus, as I work to engage the way in which Burgos creates a collective, communal identity within her poetry, I move away from examinations that are invested in what Daniel Alarcón calls "unhinged nostalgia" (Alarcón and Espinoza). Indeed, as I analyze how Burgos negotiates her positionality through poetic memory, I adhere to Alex Espinoza's claim that "there's a danger in that nostalgia, there's the danger of getting trapped in looking at things in a certain way, never breaking out of that mold, out of that prescription" (Alarcón and Espinoza). Therefore, in theorizing Burgos's poetry, I begin from a foundation of Latina/o and Black scholars and writers who reject nostalgia and, in turn, favor poetry as the language of/for survival.

In the introduction to an anthology of Nuyorican poetry, editors Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero write that poetry is often the means for ensuring survival. In oppressive

systems, Algarín and Piñero argue that the poet's role is critical because "there are no 'alternatives' without a vocabulary to express them. The poet is responsible for inventing the newness. The newness needs words, words never heard before or used before. The poet has to invent a new language, a new tradition of communication" (9). Similar to Rivera, Algarín and Piñero consider the poet's language to be a powerful tool; they write, "Poetry is the full act of naming. Naming states of mind. The rebellious, the contentious, the questioning personality wins out. And poetry is on the street burning it up with its visions of the times to be" (10-11). Thus, in their view, a poet uses their words to create memories of the past, give voice to rebellion, and generate a new imaginary for their people.

In an oft-quoted passage, poet Audre Lorde also equates poetry with Black women's survival in a European context. She writes,

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (37)

Lorde continues, "Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives" (37). Thus, like Algarín and Piñero, Lorde also views naming as a fundamental element of poetry; it is a way for women to give voice to that which was previously unspeakable, and it is a way to honor the embodied pain and struggle of oppression. Indeed, whereas Elizabeth Marchant noted the traditional tendencies in Latin America of relegating poems of personal experience and emotion to a



private, “insignificant” realm, Lorde argues that experience and feelings are to be “cherished” as “hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes” (37). Poetry, in Lorde’s terms, is an act of discursive resistance, particularly when it operates as the “illumination” which “births” knowledge and understanding (36).

Beyond Burgos, there are many examples of Latina and Latin American poets searching for new languages and new vocabularies to adequately identify and express their struggles with oppression along with a hope for something better. Cuban poet Ruth Behar writes, “I struggled to find a language in which to express who I was and who I had become through my journeys as a woman of the Cuban diaspora. I began to find the language I was seeking in poetry” (49). Aurora Levins Morales views poetry and writing as foundational in constructing a new imaginary. She lauds poetry’s ability to do the “work of infusing people’s imaginations with possibility, with the belief in a bigger future,” and she regards writing as a form of ‘cultural activism’ which is “the essential fuel of revolutionary fire” (qtd. in Browdy de Hernandez 7). Significantly, memory is implicit in each of these reflections about poetry. In her own writings, Chicana writer and scholar Cherríe Moraga maintains that the “Chicana scribe remembers, not out of nostalgia but out of hope. She remembers in order to envision. She looks backward to look forward” (*Last Generation* 190). Thus, the poet uncovers and creates memory to build something new, something better. And as these authors note, this act is also inherently embodied; as it gives voice to the embodied experiences of oppression and pain, it “illuminates” the unspeakable.

By crafting embodied memories which resist colonial and patriarchal silencing, the poet speaks new possibility into the world. In the following section, then, I examine the connections between resistive writing, embodied memory, and building a decolonial imaginary.

### **Embodied Memory**

In “Broken English Memories,” Puerto Rican scholar Juan Flores theorizes memory as an “active, creative force” (274). For Flores, the fluidity of memory has an essential function in both the present and the future. He writes, “Remembering thus always involves selecting and shaping, constituting out of what was something that never was yet now assuredly is, in the imaginary of the present, and in the memory of the future” (274). Yet, despite this assured vision of a past, Flores states that this process works to ensure no sense of “closure” as memory works, rather, to instead reveal “new breaks and exclusions” (274). Flores is particularly concerned with the ways some of these exclusions are exacerbated and legitimated by discourses. In terms of the absence of mention of the Puerto Rican diaspora, Flores argues, “A people’s memory and sense of collective continuity is broken not only by the abrupt, imposed course of historical events themselves but by the exclusionary discourses that accompany and legitimate them” (277). Yet, despite Flores’s contention that this complicit lapse results in continued “broken memory” for Puerto Ricans, he has hope that there is space within the breach for something new. Flores writes, “Occupying and transgressing the limit can be baffling, bewildering to the point of existential anguish, yet facing up to the founding reality can allow for a newfound sense of confidence and identity” (282). For Puerto Ricans, in

particular, he draws from Esmerelda Santiago as he claims the acceptance of identity is “not bound by geographical, linguistic, or behavioral boundaries” (qtd. in Flores 282). Rather he concludes that for Puerto Rican memory to be ‘repaired,’ “its incoherences and discontinuities must be probed and interrogated as they manifest themselves in lived experience and expression” (288).

One way to interrogate these discontinuities is through what Jacqui Alexander calls an intentional “living memory.” She asks,

Can we intentionally remember, all the time, as a way of never forgetting, all of us, building an archaeology of living memory, which has less to do with living in the past, invoking a past, or excising it, and more to do with our relationship to Time and its purpose? (278)

She distinguishes between a nostalgic notion of memory, or “yearning for some return” and a fluid yearning, called living memory, which always seeks to create possibility (278). Though Alexander develops living memory around the experience of reading Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, her understanding of memory and decolonization in praxis opens up a new way to remember Burgos as writing past, present, and future simultaneously. Alexander argues:

Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. (281)

Alexander’s argument for a “living memory” to combat the fragmented trauma of colonization can be better understood when we approach memory as an embodied concept.

Reading memory as embodied experience is essential to understanding writers, like Burgos, whose bodies have been inscribed with colonial excesses and whose memories have been overwritten by prescribed silence. As historian Emma Pérez writes, memory and history are inherently embodied events. She writes, “history—its stories, narration, studies—is devised through power, through knowledge, through sexuality erased, empowered, silenced, or imposed upon historical bodies” (Pérez 125). For Pérez, memory as history is always tied to the body, especially for the colonized. As she notes that “the body remembers” (108), Pérez rejects theorists like Deleuze and Guattari who construct memory as disembodied or occurring in a body which cannot remember (109). Rather, she argues that for women who operate from within/outside colonial systems which have worked to silence them, their recourse is the decolonial imaginary, a space wherein the “hidden voices...relegated to silences, to passivity” can exist “where agency is enacted through third space feminism” (xvi). This space is one which destroys colonial/colonized binaries, where the artist can now give voice to the silences in the “interstitial” space found in between the fragments “where kaleidoscopic identities are burst open and where the colonial self and colonized other become elements of multiple, mobile categoric identities” (6-7).

In detailing how Puerto Rican women build identity within these fragmented spaces, Carmen Rivera draws from other authors as she claims “memory” is the best way to “elucidate an experience, an emotion, a moment of being” (Ortiz Cofer, qtd. in Rivera 170). Rivera further describes the ways Puertorriqueña writers conceptualize memory from within the body:

They were born with the ‘medium’s burden,’ with the ‘witchcraft’ of spells and incantations for conjuring new identities, new realities, new experiences. They have danced and kissed the mango tree in rituals where they were anointed as *comadres*, women with macho asserting their creative powers in order to record their own versions of their memories, to own their bodies, and to call themselves ‘writers.’ They create poems, novels, short stories, memoirs, and essays that transform the way we look at the process of growing up and becoming a woman, at the relationship with our mothers and our daughters, at the fluidity of our lives, at our notions of nationhood, and our own sexuality. They have written, and their readers now live happily ever after, changed by their words. (175)

Within this theorization, memory is highly dynamic, performative; it is derived from the body and for the body. Moreover, memory becomes a place of transcendence. In terms of storytelling, Rivera and Judith Ortiz Cofer write that it carries “transformative powers,” and Ortiz Cofer discusses the familial legacy of storytelling, where “those tales carried with them potions, the formulas that could bring change to the lives of those who listened carefully between the lines” (qtd. in Rivera 172).

In applying this to Burgos’s poetry, I argue she is able to construct memory that gives voice to previously unspeakable excesses and silences because she writes in a vocabulary which exists outside the binary confines of colonization; in both Pérez and Ortiz’s terms, she constructs an interstitial identity which exists “between the lines.” Stripped of agency and any acceptable sense of physical belonging, even in her beloved Puerto Rico, Burgos uses her poetry to transcend her embodied restrictions and craft a third space, or differential consciousness. As Chela Sandoval notes, within this consciousness, the oppressed first recognize “their places and bodies as narrativized by and through the social body” and from this recognition “self-consciously commit to unprecedented forms of language, to remaking their own kinds of social position utilizing all media at their

disposal” (94). Thus, by giving voice to her erasure and the erasure of other Puertorriqueñas like her, Burgos is able to create new discursive space in her poetry where she can write herself into existence (L. Flores 152).

The body is essential to the creation of a new discursive memory, particularly for women of color. As Cherríe Moraga notes, the concept of landedness is impossible within these constructs, and “for women, lesbian, and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies. Throughout las Américas, all these ‘lands’ remain under occupation by an Anglo-centric, patriarchal, imperialist United States” (*Last Generation* 173). Mary Brady argues Moraga’s contention of land as body is both disruptive and transformative. Brady extends this reading to memory, writing that Moraga’s “queer land that is body, memory, desire rejects the ‘selective memory’ that has sustained so many constructions of nationalism” (152). This reading of memory, Brady contends, allows Moraga (and us) to understand that memory, far from static, can function in an embodied “churning” force for radical politics (152). Brady states, “Somewhere memories lie, rooted in bodies and spaces, in songs and words, signaling the terrains of power which Chicana/os navigate” (138). Brady builds a case that Moraga’s work on Aztlán is deeply founded in spatiality, connecting the legacy of colonialism and how its inherent “racism and homophobia and misogyny haunt the body and produce the spaces that bodies perceive, conceive, live” (138). Yet, within the body, there is always possibility to create and perform in new spaces.

In a chapter analyzing artist Luis Alfaro’s performance piece “Cuerpo Politizada,” José Esteban Muñoz articulates memory as embodied performance. He builds from the

notion that memory is a fluid concept as he writes that memory is an “anti-normative space where self is made and remade and where politics can be imagined” (“Memory Performance” 98). Muñoz continues, “While memory is not static for anyone, it is always ‘in the making’ for the minoritarian subject, who cannot perform normative citizenship and thus has no access to the standardized narratives of national cultural memory” (98). Muñoz discusses how violence, pain, and trauma and the memories of such are both a part of the Latina/o reality and also absent in the “‘official’ history that elides queer lives and the lives of people of color” (100). Thus, Muñoz argues that it is necessary for minoritarian subjects to construct and perform their own memories as a counter project to the dominant culture (100). By performing memory, these subjects can “remember, dream, and recite a self and reassert agency” against “attempts to snuff out subaltern identities” (100). Memory as performance becomes an embodied act of resistance; for those who are read as excessive, Muñoz claims that “memory is a catalyst,” which “enables performance of the self that contests the affective normativity of dominant culture” (103). Important to Muñoz’s theory of performance are the political and social ramifications of reclaiming the past as a means of informing our “immediate political present” (109). Drawing from Jonathan Boyarian, Muñoz articulates the notion of the double gesture for the minority subject; he claims that the double gesture of reclaiming the past and avoiding nostalgia and essentialism gives the minority subject a “powerful emergence into politics, the social, and the real” (102).

Burgos’s writing anticipates the claims of each of these scholars and writers as she creates and performs memory in her writing. Within her poetry, especially, Burgos

interrogates the many discontinuities that exist within a society that is both subject to imperialist oppression and nostalgic for the romanticized rurality of Spanish colonialism. As noted previously, Burgos, as a poor woman of African descent, existed outside of both of these systems; her positionalities were marginalized in both spaces. Her poetry depicts a collective anger against the violence of US imperialism and a more personal struggle with her body's erasure as amplified by the colonial nostalgia of her male peers as outlined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. In the next section, then, I analyze the way in which Burgos negotiates these material realities to construct an embodied "I", one which acknowledges the ways in which she negotiates memory to construct a space beyond the claims of coloniality.

### **In Her Own Words...**

As noted at the outset of this chapter, Burgos's biography, specifically her untimely death on the streets of New York, is rife with mythic embellishments; it is also a story which helps to uphold the colonial values that have attended nationalist ideology in Puerto Rico. As numerous feminist scholars have noted, Burgos's story has frequently been romanticized as a tragic love story or used as a cautionary tale for other migrants. In the traditional Burgos myth, we see a woman who rose from humble beginnings to prominence in literary circles; due to male alliances, she entered a political movement to which she might not otherwise have had access—yet here, the cracks start to show. She leaves her husband, and she begins an open affair with a man above her station, which causes her to leave Puerto Rico to avoid the censure of her new elite political sphere.



For the briefest time, Burgos is happy in the bustle of New York and the political haven of Havana. Alas, the implication is always that Burgos aimed too high. Her lover, a doctor from a rich, prominent family who is unwilling to risk his family fortune or handle her burgeoning success and refusal to behave as a “normal” woman, leaves her. Upon losing what many early Burgos’ historians described as “the love of her life,” her life spirals. She returns to New York, only to struggle in menial jobs, writing, searching for a publisher. Each minor success in this Burgos myth is met with a setback. She marries, moves to DC, gets divorced, returns to New York, and descends into abject poverty and alcoholism until she is hospitalized in the months prior to her death. Then, one cold morning, Burgos’s body is found on 106<sup>th</sup> street in East Harlem. With no identification, the “greatest poet in Puerto Rico” is unceremoniously buried in Potter’s Field. In the more torrid versions of the myth, Burgos’s physical excess, her height, results in her feet being cut off to fit the coffin. Yet, and this is always the postscript, Burgos’s body was discovered by friends and repatriated back to the island in great ceremony. Burgos makes it home—and becomes legend.

While this myth has captivated scholars and the public alike, it does little to interrogate either of the ways in which her embodied excesses overshadowed her literary and political legacy, or how she herself navigated these colonial inscriptions. In this section, then, I contextualize and analyze how Burgos utilizes an “I” persona in her poetry to critique the limitations of the colonized woman’s body. I argue that within this critique, Burgos performs memory in a way which reclaims her political present and creates a space for future liberation.

### **Theorizing Burgos's "I" Persona**

In 1994, the journal *Callaloo* dedicated a special issue to Puerto Rican women writers. Consuelo López Springfield's contribution examined the ways in which Julia de Burgos's autobiographical poetry negotiated feminism against the backdrop of a Nationalist party heavily influenced by Spanish colonialism in its notions of what a nation should be and what (limited) role women should play. López Springfield's essay claims Burgos used an autobiographical persona in her poetry as a means to articulate resistance to a patriarchal hierarchy. López Springfield argues colonial influences were rife in the literary scene as well as in nationalist politics, two spheres which frequently overlapped in Puerto Rico. Her essay details how light skinned men reigned supreme, with poor mixed-race women like Burgos pushed to the margins of both literature and the fight for independence. López Springfield writes that "while writers personified the homeland as female, the incarnation of patriotic ideals, its civilizing elements were masculine" (711). Drawing from Juan Gelpí, López Springfield explains the "hierarchical and populist" tenor of Puerto Rico's cultural nationalism; she states that the "paternalistic rhetoric" upholds "metaphors" of a national "family" held together by a "father" who claims elite, male privilege over his "children" (Gelpí, qtd. in López Springfield 711).

Against this patriarchal notion of nationalistic rhetoric, López Springfield claims "Burgos justifies her womanhood, her talent, and her trust in the power of the pen to revise social contracts" (709). López Springfield's analysis highlights colonial, gender, and racial oppressions (she distinguishes between each) as key elements Burgos

confronts and subverts in her poetry. In terms of Burgos's romantic and allegorical poems, López Springfield argues "Puerto Rico's legacy of colonial and racial oppression becomes the terrain for an exploration into self-identity as well as a quest for racial reconciliation" (709). Within this analysis, López Springfield again highlights the role of elite Puerto Rican men in perpetuating colonial systems which "espoused the sanctity of Spanish culture, language, Catholicism, and the traditional family unit" (711). López Springfield specifically notes how revered Nationalist Party leader, Pedro Albizu Campos admired Irish nationalism and, ultimately, "envisioned Puerto Rico as a culturally homogenous race fighting against North American Protestantism, imperialism, and racism" (711). These influences, López Springfield writes, resulted in a "dual colonialism" which Burgos had to navigate as she engaged intersectional oppression in her poetry (711).

Beyond context, López Springfield's project is significant for the way she reads Burgos's negotiation of colonial and nationalist discourses (701). In the critic's terms, Burgos's autobiographical poetry is a "rhetorical quest to justify a female poetics" (701). Writing in 1994, López Springfield counters many critics who had previously privileged and romanticized "male authority" and its influence on Burgos's work;<sup>4</sup> still, López Springfield's analysis of how Burgos resisted "collective pressure" to embody prescribed "female roles" is pertinent to my analysis (703). López Springfield claims that Burgos's autobiographical persona functions as an aesthetic response through which she challenges

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<sup>4</sup> Much of the most recent Burgos scholarship approaches her work from a Latina feminist or a decolonial frame. Thus, López Springfield's criticism might read as outdated.

a socially mandated silence for herself and other Puerto Rican women. López Springfield notes that in Lacanian terms, “Burgos’ appropriation of the word challenges the subordination of the silent female to male authority” (703). Burgos’s appropriation, in López Springfield’s critique, often takes the form of separation of self into split personas. She cites some of Burgos’s most well-known poems where Burgos crafts dialogue between distinct forms of her autobiographical persona. López Springfield cites these selves as “opposing sides” (707). Thus, López Springfield concludes, Burgos creates a new ‘female script’ wherein she “attempts to transcend the divided self ‘by both protesting and endorsing the feminine condition’” (Modleski, qtd. in López Springfield 707).

Yet, while López Springfield offers excellent critiques of Burgos’s poetry, her reliance on the “I” as autobiographical is not sufficient. Alternatively, Arturo J. Aldama provides unique insight on reconfiguring self-representation as autoethnographic rather than autobiographical. Aldama argues that subaltern subjects perform “‘autoethnographic expression’ to contest how they have been simulated and disciplined by racialized and sexualized master-narratives of savagization, infantilization, and criminalization” (94). Aldama suggests that these contestations are decolonial processes which “(re)claim and enunciate bodies of knowledge that are subjected, silenced, and outlawed by colonialist and patriarchal apparatuses of power and representation” (94). This is distinct from autobiography, which Aldama, along with scholars like Caren Kaplan and George Gusdorf, argues is a form of representation steeped in Eurocentrism as it typically depicts a privileged male subject’s quest to “allegorize the development, maintenance, and

dominance of nation-states” (105). Moreover, autobiography hinges upon a “universal self dependent on the abjection and subordination of the ‘female subject,’ as well as on those subjects who are positioned ‘peripherally to the dominant group’” (110). Thus, in keeping with Burgos translator Mariá M. Solá’s critique that reading Burgos’s first-person poetry as autobiography perpetuates Burgos’s victimhood, we must search for a different way to evaluate how Burgos’s “I” functions.

Aldama claims that viewing the subaltern first persona through the lens of *testimonio* is a better way to approach autorepresentation of marginal subjects. He writes, “the *testimonio* emerges from subjects marginalized in a given social and political economy, and it serves as a means of self-representation” (112). As Aldama notes, rather than the “egocentric ‘I’ of privilege in traditional autobiographic expression, ‘the narrator in *testimonio* on the other hand, speaks for, or in the name of a community or group’” (113). While Aldama reads Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* through this frame, he expands his argument to include all who are “multiply marginalized in the United States” (114). Citing other examples, Aldama returns to the community as he argues, “Community mutually sustains and regenerates itself in the struggles against marginalization and exploitation” (115). Importantly, the communal “I” is disruptive of imperial power, and simultaneously perilous for the speaker. Drawing from the work of Norma Alarcón, Aldama writes, “When mestiza speaking subjects enunciate their multiple subjectivities from the heterotopic interstices, discontinuities, and gaps of the U.S. nation-state, they disrupt the economies of the phallogocentric desire in homogenous nation-making” (118).

Yet while *testimonio* disrupts the privilege of the autobiographical “I” from a communal, marginalized space, Aldama’s articulation of *testimonio* does not explicitly emerge from the body. For this component, I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa. At the outset of *Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa describes writing as a bodily impulse: “I am often driven by the impulse to write something down, by the desire and urgency to communicate, to make meaning, to make sense of things, to create myself through this knowledge producing act.” (1) She continues to describe how she self-reflexively works through the trauma and healing of “the psychological/mythological methods of presentation” (4), explaining writing, theory, and method in terms of “mythmaking” (5). Within Anzaldúa’s process, “text” is explicitly tied to both imagination and the body. She writes:

For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; it’s about being in your body. The body responds physically, emotionally, and intellectually to external and internal stimuli, and writing records, orders, and theorizes about these responses. For me, writing begins with the impulse to push boundaries, to shape ideas, images, and words that travel through the body and echo in the mind into something that has never existed. The writing process is the same mysterious process that we use to make the world (5).

Anzaldúa terms this process autohistoria, or the connection between embodied personal experience and social reality (6). She defines theorizing this process, what she names autohistoria-teoría, as a “way of inventing and making knowledge, meaning, and identity through self-inscription” (6). Kakali Bhattacharya and AnaLouise Keating expand on Anzaldúa’s theory of autohistoria-teoría as they argue that this practice is more than writing one’s self into existence (345). Rather, they contend autohistoria-teoría

represents a hybridized space of creativity and bridge building, in which we use our life stories to develop deep critical, spiritual, and analytical insights to boldly theorize experiences and insights against the broader landscape of specific sociocultural discourses. (345)

They continue that it is also a space of creation for “new narratives” which both examine the “repressed and disowned parts of ourselves, excavating buried histories, and exploring the connections to the wounds we carry individually and collectively” (345); and, employ “magical thinking” which allows for new “onto-epistemologies not bound by rationality, but uninhibited in imagination, creativity, and inspiration” (346).

Narrative is integral to autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría, as Anzaldúa writes that narrative allows us to formulate identities by negotiating and disrupting the cultural story put upon us. This in turn allows us to “create an alternative identity story” (6). From the “cracks” of the narrative disruption, something new is born: a fluid *conocimiento* (consciousness) wherein those who embrace this consciousness are able to mythologize within the rupture and “create alternative forms of selfhood” (Anzaldúa 82). Anzaldúa terms those who build meaning from these disruptive, fluid fragments *nepantleras*. As Baugh-Harris and Calafell argue, artists and scholars who reject forced binaries can work from a space of *nepantla* to “gain strength” through art as “words illuminate the parts of ourselves that are always excluded” (219). Moreover, rejecting these binaries in favor of *nepantla*, or a third space, creates possibility for women like Anzaldúa and Burgos who can then work to construct a new embodied “consensual reality,” rather than passively subscribing to a reality in which they do not/cannot fully participate (Anzaldúa 84).

In reading Burgos's poetic auto-representation through this theoretical frame, I argue that she is multiply disruptive. On one hand, her nationalistic poetry challenges the United States and its imperial Puerto Rican project; on the other, her refusal to acquiesce to the maternal, helper role of woman, choosing instead to embrace desire and lust as evident in her romantic lyrics, threatens the patriarchal subjection within the Nationalist party. Thus, her "I" presents a third possibility for the women of Puerto Rico. I wish to posit that rather than mere oppositional binary, Burgos's split personas reveal a strategic rhetorical negotiation. The split persona reveals the impossibility of resisting this system from her current positionalities. Yet, in engaging (dis)embodiment through verse, Burgos is able to illuminate patriarchal oppression while also giving voice to resistance. Critiquing the social binary by calling for a better understanding of the connection between memory, intimacy and the body, Burgos is able to craft a decolonial imaginary of possibility.

### **Analyzing the Critical "I" and Intimacy as Embodied Memory**

In "Soy en cuerpo de ahora" [I Am Embodied in Now], Burgos plays with the notion of the body and memory. The poem begins:

¡Como quiere tumbarme esta carga de siglos  
que en mi espalda se bebe la corriente del tiempo!  
Timepo nunca cambiante que en los siglos se estanca  
y que nutre su cuerpo de pasados reflejos.

[How this load of centuries wants to knock me down  
that on my back drinks the current of time!  
Time never changing that stagnates in the centuries  
and that nurtures its body with past reflections]. (44-45)



Here, the load represents the weight of a nostalgic history, depicted as stagnant, dwelling on the past. Nostalgia is also an impediment to the narrator. Where the narrator's persona would choose to begin from a current place, absent of the weight of history, her culture's fixation on nostalgia holds her back. As the poem progresses, Burgos begins to articulate an "I" persona who seeks to exist outside this nostalgic fixation. Yet, this nostalgic pull takes on anthropomorphic qualities as nostalgia speaks to the narrator to quell her resistance. Nostalgia (it) tells the narrator:

Tengo miedo de lo alto de tus miras—me dice--;  
el ayer que me nutre se dobllega en lo interno  
de tu vida sencilla, que no admite pasado,  
y que vive en lo vivo dseplegada al momento;  
ya me enfada la siempre desnudez de tu mente  
que repele mi carga y se expande en lo nuevo.

[I am afraid of the height of your ambitions—it tells me--;  
the yesterday that nurtures me bends in the interior  
of your simple life that admits no past  
and that lives in the alive, open to the moment;  
now the always nakedness of your mind angers me,  
repels my load and expands in the new.] (44-45)

Nostalgia, in its preponderance, is afraid to loosen its grip on the "I" in the poem, for the "I" is rejecting its encumbrance as a means to live more openly and simply, free of the entanglements of a nostalgic history.

Nostalgia is a heavy load, described as weighted "en curpo de siglos / de prejuicios, de odios, de pasiones, de celos" [in the body of centuries / of prejudices, of hatreds, of passions, of jealousies] (44-45). The "I" refuses the claims of a violent, colonial history. Instead, she defines herself as separate from the "el vulgo ignorante" [the vulgar ignorant], choosing her own ambitions instead. As the poem progresses, the narrator

clearly articulates how the critical “I” persona resists nostalgia, now represented through an ambiguously singular “you,” by turning inward to herself. The “I” mocks nostalgia’s desire to keep her ensnared, proclaiming, “Has querido tumbarme con tu carga pesada, / mas al punto encontréme y fue vano tu empeño” [You have wanted to knock me down with your heavy load / but I found myself, and your effort was in vain] (44-45). In this rejection of a nostalgic past, the narrator issues a declaration for the possibility of embodiment in the present: “Soy en cuerpo de ahora; del ayer no sé nada. / En lo vivo mi vida sabe el soy de lo nuevo” [I am embodied in now; about yesterday I know nothing. / In the alive, my life knows the I Am of the new] (44-45). Her existence is no longer contained, limited by the nostalgia of her social context. Rather, the “I” persona is able to constitute herself into embodied existence by embracing an ontology of emergence, unfettered by the weight of nostalgia. Memory, here, becomes a tool of the present and a possibility for the future. Existence beyond the claims of “ayer” and “el pasado” allows the “I” to “expand in the new.” Thus, in this poem, Burgos utilizes auto-representation to both critique a culture of nostalgia while working through the body to construct something new. This method of critique is particularly important given the colonial/imperial contexts of Burgos’s world.

As noted in Chapter 2, a poor mixed-race woman in 1930s Puerto Rico had no space to materially challenge her position in society. Typically, such women were silenced and/or erased from history. For women like Julia de Burgos, adherence to a peripheral role was the only entrance into society, and then only as a marginalized participant. Maintaining these roles was an action of containment which promised to reduce the threat

of harm against those, like Burgos, who were marked by embodied excesses of poverty, racialization, and sexuality. Yet, Burgos was not satisfied with this containment. For Burgos, poetry became a significant outlet of resistance.

In her self-styled poem “A Julia de Burgos,” Burgos contends with the trauma of performing gendered expectations by pitting the public performance of Julia de Burgos against an “I” narrator who condemns Burgos’s capitulation to social norms. In the poem, Julia, the one who adheres to social norms, is the persona who must be destroyed. The resistive persona, the “I” challenges the public face of Julia as the “I” seeks to destroy the social script. Burgos’s choice to counter a socially compliant persona with a (dis)embodied, angry, resistive persona allows her to give voice to those socially imposed excesses which were rendered unspeakable. Pérez Rosario notes that in letting the public Burgos persona succumb to the “I” (what Pérez Rosario terms the “false” and “true” selves, respectively), Burgos uniquely positions herself against her contemporaries in a stated preference for the “authentic” (*Becoming Julia* 38).

As the poem begins, the disembodied self, the “I”, acknowledges that “las gentes murmuran que yo so tu enemiga / porque dicen que en verso doy al mundo tu yo” [the people murmur that I am your enemy / because they say that in verse I give the world your me] (2-3). As noted in the scholarship of Pérez Rosario and Jossiana Arroyo, Burgos’s poetry as lyrical, erotic verse was often deemed excessive in comparison to the novels and nationalist verse of Burgos’s Puertorriqueño peers. The “I”, then, can be read to understand this perceived excess, society’s role in trying to contain it. Yet, the “I” does not accept this containment. She continues,

Mienten, Julia de Burgos. Mienten, Julia de Burgos.  
La que se alza en mis versos no es tu voz: es mi voz  
porque tú eres ropaje y la esencia soy yo;  
y el más profundo abismo se tiende entre las dos.

[They lie, Julia de Burgos. They lie, Julia de Burgos.  
Who rises in my verses is not your voice. It is my voice  
because you are the dressing and the essence is me;  
and the most profound abyss is spread between us]. (2-3)

This stanza, the second in the poem, is a move to distinguish between the embodiment of the public Burgos and the voice/essence which is unable to co-exist with Burgos's public persona. Later in the poem, the "I" rejects the material trappings of this persona, the woman forced to perform societal rituals of matrimony, gendered obedience, and even physical alterations. The "I" condemns how the public Burgos, or the embodied form of Burgos, adapts to these constraints. The disembodied "I" contrasts how "Tú te rizas el pelo y te pintas; yo no; / a mí me riza el viento; a mí pinta el sol" [You curl your hair and paint your face; not me; / the wind curls my hair; the sun paints me] (2-3). Attacking the maternal, supportive role of the Puerto Rican woman, the "I" also critiques Burgos's capitulation: "Tú eres dama casera, resignada, sumisa, / atada a los prejuicios de los hombres; yo no" [You are a housewife, resigned, submissive, / tied to the prejudices of men; not me] (2-3).

Indeed, the "I" extends her critique of the ways in which Burgos's colonized body limits her, arguing that the body and voice cannot exist together. In the second to the last stanza of the poem, following an oppositional positioning of the embodied Burgos as "flor de aristocracia" [flower of aristocracy] in contrast to the "I" as "flor del pueblo" [flower of the people] (4-5), the "I" rejects her coexistence with Burgos. Rather, she

exclaims, “Tú, clavada al estático dividend ancestral, / y yo, un uno en la cifra del divisor social, / somos el duelo a muerte que se acerca fatal” [You nailed to the static ancestral dividend, / and me, a one in the numerical social divider, / we are the duel to death who fatally approaches] (4-5). Here, I read the “I” claim as one in which a static ancestry, tied to colonialism in this specific context, leaves no space for liberation. In her embodied form, Burgos is condemned to repeat the same pattern of existence, one in which she is always subjugated and silent. It is presumed that only in the disembodied form can the “I” exist free from these constraints (4-5).

Pérez Rosario, in keeping with scholars like Lopez Springfield, reads Burgos’s split persona as detailing the “two incompatible parts of herself, revealing that identity is a performance” (38). While I agree that Burgos is critiquing the ways in which she is forced to dually perform one identity while suppressing another, I find that there is more at play within Burgos’s resistive critique. In recording the ways in which her public/poet selves are in conflict, I concur that Burgos is giving voice to the ways in which women in Puerto Rico are continually subjugated into performing a socially inscribed femininity. Yet while the disembodied “I” proclaims freedom from these bonds, the articulated duality within the poem keeps the “I” connected to Burgos. Where Pérez Rosario and others read the “I” as victorious in “el duelo a muerte” [the duel to death] (Burgos 4-5), I read this line as an implicit admission that in their struggle, where they cannot exist together, they also do not exist without the other. Despite claims of liberation, the “I” persona is permanently subject to a colonizer’s vocabulary wherein her freedom is only possible in contrast to Julia de Burgos’s oppression. Yet, it is within this poem where

Burgos begins to articulate a notion of liberation from within the interstitial space of the “profound abyss” (3).

Returning to my previous claims in this chapter that poetry and memory articulated from a decolonial space can be transformative, I analyze Burgos’s critical notion of the “I” in other poems where she does not position her auto-representation along a colonial binary. In the poem *Intima* [Intimate], the “I” transitions from one part of a binary, an oppositional force against colonial oppression, to something new entirely. Burgos describes a process of disembodiment: “Me fui perdiendo átomo por átomo de mi carne / y fui resbalándome poco a poco al alma” [I began getting lost atom by atom of my flesh / and slipping little by little to the soul] (6-7). In this space, not pitted against an embodied colonized self, Burgos’s “I” describes herself beyond definition, where “Me conocí mensaje lejos de la palabra. / Me sentí vida al reverse de una superficie de colores y formas. / Y me vi claridad ahuyentado la sombra vaciada en la tierra desde el hombre” [I knew myself as a message far from the word. / I felt myself a life inverted from the surface of colors and forms, / and saw myself a light scaring man’s shadow emptied on the earth] (6-7). In this poem, the “I” ceases to exist within a colonial structure; rather, she exists on a plane outside of these bounds of time and space, even as “Los hombres se mueven ajenos a sí mismos / para agarrar ese minuto índice / que los conduce por varias direcciones estáticas.” [Men move unaware / to grab the minute hand / that points them in several static directions] (6-7). Instead, the “I” is a fluid being who “llegué hasta mí, íntima” [arrived at myself, intimate]. Even when the “I” seemingly returns to a fleshly body, she is no longer beholden to these claims. The “I” proclaims, “Sigo siendo mensaje

legos de la palabra” [I go on being a message far from the word] (6-7). This liberated embodiment echoes the critiques she makes about nostalgia in “Soy en cuerpo de ahora.” Just as we see there the possibilities granted in memory newly formed outside of the weight of colonial nostalgia, in this poem Burgos’s “I” persona is capable of liberation by achieving self-intimacy beyond the limitations of time, space, and materiality, away from the men who unquestioningly adhere/enforce these bonds,

In “Yo misma fui mi ruta” [I Was My Own Route], Burgos again uses the “I” persona to critique her position within society, though in this instance the “I” begins from a reflective space, almost lamenting her inability to assimilate: “Yo quise ser como los hombres quisieron que yo fuese; / un intento de vida; un juego al escondite con mi ser” [I wanted to be like men wanted me to be; / an attempt at life; / a game of hide and seek with my being] (56-57). Here, there is again a sense of incommensurability between social expectations and an embodied wholeness. Yet, where the “I” in “A Julia de Burgos” exists in opposition to the public persona of Julia de Burgos, here the “I” simply cannot adhere to the strictures of society despite the best attempts of society.

Their attempted containment occurs in visceral, embodied terms as the narrator describes how “A cada paso adelantado en mi ruta hacia el frente / rasgaba mis espaldas el aleteo desesperado / de los troncos viejos” [At each advancing step forward / my back was ripped by the desperate flapping wings / of the old guard] (56-57). The “I” persona is actively moving forward, away from the restrictions placed upon her body and her being; yet, the farther she progresses, the more desperate and violent the attempts to restrain her.

Still, the more “los troncos viejos” [the old guard] attempt to rein in her progress, the more futile their attempts. She states:

Pero la rama estaba desprendida para siempre,  
y a cada nuevo azote la mirada mí  
se separaba más y más y más de los lejanos  
horizontes aprendidos:  
y mi rostro iba tomando la expresión que le venía de adentro,  
la expresión definida que asomba un sentimiento  
de liberación íntima;  
un sentimiento que surgía  
del equilibrio sostenido entre mi vida  
y la verdad del beso de los senderos nuevos.

Ya definido mi rumbo en el presente,  
me sentí brote de todos los suelos de la tierra,  
de los suelos sin historia,  
de los suelos sin porvenir,  
del suelo siempre suelo sin orillas  
de todos los hombres y de todas las épocas.

Y fui toda en mí como fue en mí la vida...

[But the branch was unpinned forever,  
and at each new whiplash my look  
separated more and more and more from the distant  
familiar horizons;  
and my face took the expression that came from within,  
the defined expression that hinted at a feeling  
of intimate liberation;  
a feeling that surged  
from the balance between my life  
and the truth of the kiss of the new paths.

Already my course now set in the present,  
I felt myself a blossom of all the soils of the earth,  
of the soils without history,  
of the soils without a future,  
of the soil always soil without edges  
of all the men and all the epochs.

And I was all in me as was life in me... ] (56-57)



Here, each attempt to restrain her through “cada nuevo azote” [each new whiplash] only deepens her resistance and desire for liberation. The narrator’s gaze longs for something beyond the known as she searches for “la verdad del beso de los senderos nuevos” [the truth of the kiss of new paths] (56-57). Through the critical “I” persona, the narrator describes the “liberación íntima” [intimate liberation] which only exists beyond “horizontes aprendidos” [familiar horizons] (56-57) as she moves along these new paths. This embodied rejection of a normative culture, represented in her action of moving down new, distant paths, constitutes a decolonial imaginary similar to that of “Soy en cuerpo de ahora.” In “Yo misma fui ruta,” the narrator, as the title suggests, serves as her own route. The “I” moves from the heavy burden and containment of traumatic past to a path beginning “en el presente” (56). This present is a space of possibility for the “I” as well as Burgos, and she grounds it in a symbol of growth: “todos los suelos de la tierra” [all the soils of the earth] (56-57). But these soils are fresh, untilled by the ravages of history with a future unclaimed by those beholden to violent past. Forging her own path, the “I” is contained only by her own unmarked, decolonized body: “Fui toda en mí como fue en mí la vida” [I was all in me as was life in me] (56-57). Thus, by constructing an intimate space of existence, the “I” is liberated.

Intimacy, as seen in several of the poems above, has a particular significance in Burgos’s writing and in the ways in which she constitutes liberation by delinking memory from a colonial history to create possibility in the present and the future. While the poems discussed thus far have examined the ways in which Burgos’s critical “I”

achieves intimacy by turning inward, she also uses this concept to construct a more communal sense of liberation. In “Amaneceres” [Dawnings], Burgos’s narrator offers a broader invitation to intimate revolution. In a repeated stanza refrain, the narrator exclaims

!Amaneceres en mi alma!  
!Amaneceres en mi mente!

Cuando se abre la puerta intima  
para entrar a una misma,  
¡qué de amaneceres!”

[Dawnings in my soul!  
Dawnings in my mind!

When the intimate door is opened  
to enter one’s self,  
what dawnings!] (22-23)

This call is urgent and universal: “hacerla presente / y hacerla robusta / y hacerla universal” [make it now, / and make it robust, / and make it universal] (22-23). For within these universal dawnings, there is a call for “despertanda rebeldías” [awakening rebellions] against the “burgueses” [bourgeois] who cling to a colonial system (22-23).

By rejecting this system, the narrator argues that one can approach existence by forging an intimate connection between oneself, the embodied senses, and the earth:

Allí dentro,  
bien adentro,  
asomarse a la vida.

Ver...  
Oír...  
Oler...  
Gustar...  
y Tocar...

tierra.

[There inside,  
deep inside,  
to approach life.

To see...  
To listen...  
To smell...  
To taste...  
and touch...  
earth.] (Burgos 22-23)

In Burgos's critique, these senses are what compose "un cuerpo y una mente" [one body and one mind] (24-25). By engaging the senses, one is more capable of becoming whole (24-25). Yet, the narrator articulates a clear disparity between "el hombre todo" and

la dimensión social:  
la tradición,  
la raza,  
la capital.

[the social dimension:  
tradition,  
race,  
capital.] (Burgos 24-25)

This social dimension is "el hombre aburguesado" [man bourgeoisified] (24-25). Yet, where Burgos's personal poems construct an imaginary where liberation is possible by rejecting colonial constraints by turning within, the narrator in this poem demands action, revolution. To achieve liberation, wholeness is achieved by answering the call "A ese hombre burgués / hay que destruirlo / ahora" [That bourgeois man / must be destroyed, / now] (24-25).

In this poem, as well as each of the others, Burgos performs embodied memory in ways which anticipate the work of scholars like Juan Flores, Muñoz, and Alexander. As Flores noted, memory is an active, fluid constitution of an “imaginary in the present, and in the memory of the future” (274). Moreover, it is also a process of traversing embodied “anguish” to create a “newfound sense of confidence and identity” in both personal and communal ways (Flores 282). Burgos does this in what Muñoz identifies as reclamation of the past to inform the “immediate political present” (109), citing the social and cultural limitations on her body before rejecting them by physically and symbolically refuting that version of body/memory and constructing a new embodied self. Moreover, Burgos crafts memory absent of nostalgia. Rather, she critiques nostalgia, instead choosing to perform memory outside the boundaries of her lived containment, wherein memory “enables” her performance of self “that contests the affective normativity” of her colonial and imperial limitations. She does this by performing what we’ve seen Alexander call “living memory” (278). Through this performance, Burgos’s yearning for liberation is the desire which drives the negotiation of her fragmented, colonial context to help her “subvert” and “displace” the trauma and pain of a context where she is always already read as excessive, and where her body is always already marked for dismemberment (Alexander 281).

In reading these poems together it is clear that despite society’s claims upon Burgos, she utilized her poetry to both resist and construct a decolonial imaginary for herself and those she hoped would “awaken” and realize her vision of the present and future.

Theorizing and representing her resistive claims through the use of critically reflexive

auto-representation in the “I” persona, Burgos becomes less tied to social norms and limitations, and she turns within to an intimate space of liberation, free of the inroads of coloniality. In this internal space, where the “I” is neither under the claims of “civilization” or positioned as the narrative arbiter of liberation within a binary, Burgos’s “I” critiques her society and constructs a decolonial imaginary outside of oppression, where history, future, and life are still to be written.

### **Regaining the Self through a Decolonial Imaginary**

By reading Burgos’s poetic “I” persona through a decolonial framework of autohistoria-teoría, I have claimed that Burgos’s “I” is engaged in the process of self-inscribing new possibility even as she critiques the colonial and imperial strictures of her society. As I noted in Chapter 3, Burgos frequently engages the violence and trauma of US imperialism in explicit terms. Yet, it is here in her critical interrogation of her positionality where Burgos most clearly works to create a new horizon of possibility. Pérez Rosario considers this persona to be that of a nomadic subject, one who “resists settling into socially coded ways of thinking and behavior” and who “subverts conventions and exists outside prescribed social norms” (52). Pérez Rosario builds her understanding of the nomadic subject around the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Rosi Braidotti. Pérez Rosario argues that Burgos uses her persona as a nomadic subject to create “escape routes” from her imperialistic, paternalistic society. Yet, while nomadic consciousness is also positioned as resistive, the emphasis on escape in the way in which Pérez Rosario deploys it is rather passive.

I would amend this reading of Burgos's "I" from nomadic subject to that of Emma Pérez's notion of the diasporic subject. While both the nomadic and diasporic subject are clearly cognizant of their oppression, the diasporic subject is actively and bodily engaged in their liberation. Rather than escape or a space of metaphorical "becoming," the diasporic subject negotiates "a raced culture within many kinds of identities" to "intervene, construct newness, and 'live inside with a difference'" (78). As Pérez theorizes it, the diasporic subject is also directly connected to the decolonial imaginary: "The diasporic subject is always re-creating the unimagined, the unknown, where mobile third space identities thrive, and where the decolonial imaginary gleans the diasporic's subjecthood" (79). Reading Burgos's "I" through this lens allows us to experience the imaginary that Burgos envisions beyond coloniality and imperialism. In Burgos's decolonial imaginary, the body is no longer read through its excesses; rather, both excesses and silences are rendered insignificant as Burgos's "I" turns inward to develop an intimate third space of liberation.

As I move to the next chapter to investigate how Burgos's decolonial influence persists among Puerto Rican artists and their methods of commemoration, I note Emma Pérez's argument that while women continue to be subordinated within nationalist paradigms, "women as agents have always constructed their own spaces interstitially, within nationalisms, nationalisms that often miss women's subtle interventions" (33). In her own study, Pérez examines the moment between the colonial and the postcolonial in Mexico. She writes that there is a time lag within this transition when the decolonial imaginary is fundamental as it is only through third space feminism where "the silent

gain their agency” (33). Yet, as my study is situated in Puerto Rico, an island stripped of national autonomy, left dependent upon a US mainland/metropolis in all capacities, I argue that there has been no move to the postcolonial. Thus, the decolonial imaginary, the feminist third space, remains as vital a space for survival today as it did in Burgos’s era. I expand upon this in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Rivera Remembers

As the stage lights come up, two women appear on stage. The backdrop is comprised of alternate panels, some panels black with white scribbled lines and cursive text, difficult to decipher from the audience. The effect is frantic, manic. Between these panels, there is another, painted in vibrant blues, oranges, and reds which blends into the scene painted on the stage floor: the colors appear to move, creating a depiction of flowing water. On stage right, there is a window box, draped with a painted representation of the Puerto Rican flag. At the top of stage left, there is a wooden desk, with old, weathered books piled precariously high. There is paper and a pen on the center of the desk, turned just slightly to the right as if one were to begin writing. Next to the desk, one of the women sits, slightly bent over, clutching her white shawl to her body almost as if in pain. Wearing a tan, simple dress, her dark hair is parted in the center, pulled tightly back into a bun. It is Julia de Burgos. She looks to stage right, her body and face tense, as if in frightened anticipation of the other woman. The second woman is standing in the background, speaking even before the lights are up. In contrast to Julia, the woman's dark hair is free, flowing down her shoulders. She is garbed all in white, in a casual dress which drapes almost to her feet. Where Julia is hunched, hiding, this woman stands erect. Her voice is clear, and as the scene progresses, she moves toward Julia as if



to emphasize each line. This character is the WOMAN (“Julia de Burgos: Child of Water,” 00:00:06-00:00-17).<sup>5</sup>

The above scene opens Act II in Carmen Rivera’s play *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water*. Rivera describes the WOMAN as “Julia’s Soul” in the character list (*Child of Water* 4). Within this production, the WOMAN is portrayed as an alter-ego of Burgos, one whom Gloria Waldman describes as the “Soul, who embodies the artist, the fighter, the champion of personal and political freedom” (xi). This is evident as the scene progresses; the audience witnesses the WOMAN performing the poem “A Julia de Burgos,” or what Waldman describes as Burgos’s “Latin American feminist anthem” (xii). As WOMAN performs the poem, she speaks angrily at/to Julia’s character. As I outline in my analysis, this scene in the play, which encompasses Julia’s angry reaction, illuminates the embodied materiality of Burgos’s struggle to overcome oppression by theorizing a decolonial imaginary through her poetry. Indeed, Rivera’s explicit script direction that WOMAN “must NOT appear like a Soul but as a regular person” is significant (4); Burgos’s struggle must be fought from and through the body.

Building from my work in Chapter 4, wherein I claim writing and memory are embodied resistive acts, I argue that this scene is significant because it serves as a unique commemoration of Burgos’s life and work through performance. Whereas the USPS Burgos commemoration works as a public memory project which hinges upon, in Pierre Nora’s terms, a “notion produced, defined, established, constructed, decreed, and

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<sup>5</sup> The WOMAN character is always written in capital letters in Rivera’s script.

maintained by the artifice and desire of a society fundamentally absorbed by its own transformation and renewal,” (6), Rivera’s play is something entirely outside of those bounds. As Director of the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration, Brenda Torres Barreto provides an epigraph for the play which she describes as an act of “witnessing.” She writes that Rivera has tapped into Burgos, as Rivera honors Burgos in a “truly genuine and sensitive way. Carmen Rivera not only gives us the space to discover Burgos, but also offers us the sacred space to discover the dualities within ourselves.” Rivera, as a writer and playwright, has worked toward this goal in numerous projects. Yet, her tribute to Burgos is particularly critical for my analysis because it also works against the ways in which public memory projects typically appropriate marginalized icons by melding their stories to fit nostalgic or nationalistic ideals. Instead, Rivera crafts characters which speak to Burgos’s own difficulty in constructing compatible identities in a body too often silenced and erased in the space of dual colonialism (Lopez Springfield).

In a second epigraph to the play, Jason Ramírez describes Rivera’s play as “an antidote for an apathetic nostalgic gaze for Puerto Rico’s past.” Touching on Burgos’s inability to locate a space of belonging, Ramírez continues, “In *Child of Water*, the iconic poet Julia de Burgos is caught in an intermediary state of longing for and longing to; attempting to recreate what was, while attempting to break free and establish a new, politically engaged and self-actualized identity.” This reading of Burgos is compatible with Rivera’s own agenda and the ways in which Rivera herself has navigated her positionalities as a Puerto Rican woman living in New York. Integral to this navigation

is creating a narrative. In Rivera's own words, the role of writers in preserving memories of the Puerto Rican diaspora is critical because

We are adding to the narrative... We are also taking back our narrative... Society is telling you who you are. It is telling you who is significant and who is not. People internalize these messages. By exploring our experience, we are redefining our culture. We are affirming and declaring who we are. ("La Historia")

It is the negotiation of defining and declaring an identity, despite a hegemonic narrative, which draws me to Rivera's play. In it, I see veins of memory creation which both are influenced by and bear witness to Julia de Burgos.

In her investigation of the breadth of Burgos's legacy among writers, Vanessa Pérez Rosario contrasts "lifeless statues" and other public projects with the liberatory possibilities of narrative, poetry, and performance (*Becoming Julia* 107). For Pérez Rosario, these commemorations, tributes, and critical reflections are inherently connected to the authors' own identities. She argues:

Latina writers are conscious of writing for and about their communities, which are defined as both individual national groups and interethnic... Women writers who participated in this these movements grappled with Burgos's memory and intellectual legacy as part of a search for their history and the creation of new identities. In the process of remembering Burgos, they preserved, rejected and modified parts of her story as they develop a politicized awareness of their structural position as women. (107)

As she traces various authors who have engaged Burgos, Pérez Rosario notes that this politicized awareness often allows these women to create and generate spaces of possibility in a way similar to Burgos. Just as Burgos used her poetry to revisit and bear witness to the pain of colonization in Puerto Rico while also forging a path of possibility for women subject to the erasures of a dual colonialism, Pérez Rosario argues Puerto

Rican diaspora writers engage the “stories of their ancestors...to re-create the past and envision a more hopeful future” (113). She continues by noting that these stories allow writers and artists to “break the historical silence that has characterized their place in society, while offering the infinite possibilities of self-invention” (113). Citing poets and performance artists like Mariposa and La Bruja, Pérez Rosario reiterates the need to disrupt and break silence, and she argues that remembering Burgos serves as “a way to connect to the past and imagine a better future beyond annihilation and silence” (120). Pérez Rosario is particularly invested in the role of performance in remembering Burgos as a “poet of presence and authenticity, rejecting the modernist impersonality through oral performance, passion, and rebelliousness” (122). Moreover, Pérez Rosario argues that performance allows writers, like Rivera, to use Burgos’s memory to “mediate their relationship to history in the process of inventing new identities, new languages, and new ways of thinking” (122).

Therefore, in this chapter, I analyze how Rivera’s play engages Burgos as way to both interrogate Rivera’s own lived experience while also bearing faithful witness to Burgos’s (dis)embodiment rhetoric in her poetry. I argue that performance is integral to Rivera’s ability to bear such witness, and that Rivera’s own performance of negotiation is a significant example of a decolonial feminist memory project. To that end, I have organized my chapter in several sections. First, I provide a foundational understanding of Latina/o performance theory by engaging the work of Bernadette Calafell. Second, I situate faithful witnessing as a method within decolonial feminist scholarship. I draw largely from decolonial philosopher Maria Lugones to inform my understanding of

faithful witnessing. In my third section, I argue Rivera is engaged in a decolonial memory project. I analyze Rivera's play and the ways in which she blends faithful witnessing with performance to construct a memory of Burgos (and herself) as artists who find liberation through invention.

### **Performance Theory**

In my introduction to this dissertation, I framed my reading of Burgos as an answer to Darrell Wanzer-Serrano's call to practice "epistemic disobedience" by delinking Burgos's memory from a singular colonial narrative of Puerto Rican history ("Cite article" 650). Within this project, I have been particularly invested in furthering Wanzer-Serrano's rhetorical project to "listen to what has been silenced" as I work to meet Burgos in her own localized contexts through pluriversal methods (653). In Chapter 4, I built from scholarship centered on and through the body to examine how Burgos used her poetry as a method of resistance, crafting embodied memory to create a decolonial imaginary wherein a liberated existence was possible. Here, I theorize how Carmen Rivera practices faithful witnessing through performance as a commemorative antidote to public memory projects which subsume and assimilate rich complex histories into a dominant narrative. To inform my understanding of performance, I turn to rhetorician and performance scholar Bernadette Calafell.

I draw from Calafell precisely because her work springs from the nexus of rhetoric and performance, and she already seeks to infuse rhetorical studies with a new vocabulary to engage and elevate women of color, particularly Latinas. Calafell cites a call by Raka Shome for rhetorical theories which examine

rhetorical situations and experiences of ‘disjunctured diasporic cultural identities’ and asks how ‘cultural diasporas use rhetoric to negotiate through their different culturally disjunctured or pastiched states to enable some kind of shared meaning with people in their daily experience. (qtd. in Calafell 18)

Thus, in *Theorizing Performance*, Calafell’s work addresses what she calls the “false split” between rhetorical studies and performance. Moving beyond the traditional frame of rhetorical criticism, Calafell’s work explores avenues of analysis which engage the body and the everyday, no longer privileging the text or perpetuating the exclusion of marginalized people (3). She centers on performance studies and notes how performance scholars “have long been concerned with the ways historically marginalized people resist the interpellative power of dominant discourse” (74). In her work, then, Calafell calls for an “embodied approach” in which the reader “feels” the text (5). The body and performance are central to this call. Calafell writes that her pluriversal approach springs from an “understanding that if we are going to reach the text produced by historically marginalized communities, we must meet these texts on their own terms methodologically” (7). Further, she encourages an inward glance as she urges us, as scholars, to accept the limitations of “traditional or dominant texts” (7).

Calafell builds her approach from performance scholars like Dwight Conquergood, who argues that against a “scriptocentric” academy, we can draw “some oppositional force, some resistance” from performance (“Beyond the Text” 25-26). Conquergood argues that textualism is inherent in the dominant universalism of our “regimes of knowing” (26). He turns to performance as a paradigm which “insists upon immediacy, involvement, and intimacy as modes of understanding” (26). As an alternative means of

knowing, Conquergood claims “performance is a more conceptually astute and inclusionary way of thinking about subaltern cultural practices and intellectual-philosophical activities” (26). Citing the work of Frederick Douglass, who argued that one could only engage the meaning of slavery outside of text through an “experiential, participatory epistemology” (27), Conquergood emphasizes Douglass’s call for “*listening to and being touched by*” performance (27, emphasis Conquergood’s). Indeed, here we again see the significance of feeling, which is paramount in Calafell’s approach. Moreover, both scholars view performance as means of breaking free from stagnant, normative traditions. In Conquergood’s words, performance is a challenge to the ethnocentrism of text in that it is “transgression, that force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” (32). Yet, even within performance studies, Conquergood argues text and its hegemonic inscription is “insufficiently challenged” (33). Given the pervasiveness of textual privilege, and with that an overarching adherence to singular ways of knowing, how do we delink from such a pervasive system of knowledge?

Calafell does this by centering her work in theories of the flesh. She argues that theories of the flesh “privilege subjectivity and embodied knowledges as sites of fruitful theory building, giving women of color back the power to speak as authorities of their own experiences” (8). Again, feeling is central to this process as Calafell notes theories of the flesh challenge, in Conquergood’s terms, “the intellectual’s error of believing ‘that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned’” (qtd. in Calafell 8). This concept is critical in my choice to analyze

Carmen Rivera's play. I selected her work because she is a Puerto Rican woman and writer, navigating her identity from a diasporic subjectivity wherein she has to reconcile what it means to be in the United States and "from" the Island, belonging simultaneously to both/neither. Thus, by considering how Rivera remembers Burgos, I argue she builds from a diasporic intimacy which informs an embodied knowledge of Burgos that is absent and incomprehensible in projects like the USPS stamp series.

Intimacy is integral to embodied performance, and as I argue in Chapter 4, it is also deeply embedded in the self-liberation Burgos imagines within her poetry. Citing Conquergood, Calafell notes that "performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them" (qtd. in Calafell 10). Calafell outlines the importance of intimacy as she draws from the work of José Estaban Muñoz, noting how the "affect or space of possibility is a mode of belonging made possible through a mode of identification or disidentification" (Calafell 27). Calafell continues by arguing that these modes result in an "anti-normative effect compounded by our feelings of estrangement as a result of being in a new space," and she concludes that the feelings enabled by these performances of estrangement reveal "a shared sense of loss," or what Sventlana Boym calls "diasporic intimacy" (Calafell 27). Within Boym's terms, diasporic intimacy is constituted by "uprootedness and defamiliarization" (499). She writes that such intimacy is only accessible through "indirection and intimation, through stories and secrets" (499). Arguing along with Boym that this intimacy supersedes the private and can be "framed by art, embellished by memory" (500), I find that Rivera's play utilizes such silences and intimations. Working



from within Burgos's words and context, Rivera directs an embodied performance of both, utilizing movement and physical contestation to reveal a deeper understanding of the ways in which Burgos, and by extension Rivera herself, uses the body to negotiate her positionalities.

Boym's theorization of diasporic intimacy is also significant to my project in that it is void of nostalgia. Boym argues diasporic intimacy is not a utopic space of connection (499). As she points out, such intimacy is not "a comforting recovery of identity through a shared nostalgia of home" (501). Rather, diasporic intimacy is situated in a dystopic hopefulness that hinges upon "chance encounters" which help exiles form "collective frameworks of memory" (499) Here, even as they are "haunted by images of home and homeland," the diasporic subject is also cognizant of "the furtive pleasures of exile" (499-500). Within Boym's theory of diasporic intimacy, there is an emphasis on survival, and those who share in it understand that "the illusion of complete belonging has been shattered" (502). Ultimately, diasporic intimacy does not build from or prize a utopic "nostalgic narrative;" rather, it emphasizes a shared sense of surviving the "common loss and pain of displacement" to "inhabit exile" (523-524). Yet, while Boym is careful to caution against reading such intimacy as a nostalgic reconstitution of past identity, she does note that this "common wound could become a community bond" (523).

In her scholarship, Calafell articulates community by again engaging the significance of feeling, writing that our identities are often "established through a connection with a feeling" (15). These feelings derive from many methods of representation wherein marginalized subjects are read through hegemonic frames. Importantly, Calafell explores

how this occurs through the body, acknowledging the many ways in which people of color are read as excessive. Citing how Bhabha, Muñoz, and Lancaster theorize performances of excess as resistance, Calafell concludes that “excess serves as a point of identification that enables community not only resistance” (18). Adequately accounting for the ways in which this shared identification through excess manifests requires “a reflexive participatory knowledge” (20). As Calafell notes, this type of knowledge “privileges not only less traditionally accepted practices of theorizing but also Other ways of knowing by challenging the mind/body split,” including “cultural performances, which have been overlooked because of a bias of textuality” (20). Here, Calafell advocates for a “participatory perspective” because of the value it places on everyday practices and the affect that is created from such practices (20).

As part of this project, Calafell builds “toward the performative possibilities of memory to re-center difference” (27). She, like many of the Chicana and Latina scholars cited within this dissertation, center narrative as a means of renegotiating memories (66). Citing her own pilgrimage experience, Calafell notes how present, past, and future are opened through the “performance or re-embodiment of memory” (66). Just as Burgos works through embodied trauma as a means for new future possibility, so too does Calafell as she calls upon “trauma to become susceptible to critique through its telling, this performance, this pilgrimage enables a re-storied history that is activated in each step I take” (66). Inherent in this performance is Calafell’s understanding of “using personal experience, body knowledge, and reflection to bear upon my history and theorizations” (66). As I argue below, Rivera also approaches her remembrance of Burgos through a

similar understanding, as she inflects Burgos's life and work through a frame which also accounts for her own experience and reflections. Indeed, as Calafell and others note, how Latinas remember is often dictated by the ways in which our bodies "negotiate historical trauma and systemic violence" (93). Burgos was constantly negotiating the impact of colonialism as a diasporic Puerto Rican woman, whereas Rivera, though born in New York, carries the legacy of these traumas (Calafell 93). Thus, rather than being "socialized, molded, or modified to fit the expectations" of society (Calafell 75), wherein "discourses of whiteness and white identity by default get to occupy multiple space or possibilities" (Calafell 79), Rivera's play engages memory as a means to delve into the complexity of Burgos's lived trauma.

Performance scholar Diana Taylor also notes the significance of the body and memory within performance. She writes that along with the transmission of knowledge, "embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities" regardless of the literacy of the society (xviii). Moreover, Taylor avers that if "performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity" (xvii). Taylor's work situates memory in both archival (written, stored memory) and the repertoire (embodied, performed memory). Theorizing memory in this way significantly blurs the lines between history and memory, which runs counter to many public memory scholars, including foundational memory theorist Pierre Nora. Taylor argues that traditional memory scholarship, divided into a binary notion of true/false, aids the polarization between speech and text, wherein the archival represents hegemonic power and the repertoire is allocated to the anti-hegemonic

resistance (22). Taylor contends that both those with and without power can make use of embodied performance, yet maintaining this binary relegates the repertoire to a subjugated position of primordial past, privileging the power of recorded text (22). Taylor's work, then seeks, to bridge the archive and the repertoire, though she notes that within archival memory knowledge is disembodied as it becomes separated from the "knower" (19). By contrast, the repertoire is wholly embodied and fluid, encompassing "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing," all acts which are "nonreproducible" present knowledge, carried within and through the body (20). Thus, meaning and knowledge in the repertoire are always in flux. Acknowledging Taylor's articulation of memory through the archive and the repertoire, what method informs how Carmen Rivera utilizes performance to avoid replicating a memory of Burgos that is "immunized against alterity" (de Certeau, qtd. in Taylor 19)? To answer this, I turn to María Lugones's concept of faithful witnessing.

### **Faithful Witnessing**

In her 2003 text *Peregrinajes/pilgrimages: Theorizing Coalitions Against Multiple Oppressions*, philosopher María Lugones performs scholarship as a pilgrimage toward coalition. She states that her goal is to identify liberatory levels of possibility. These levels range from the personal such as emotional or comprehension, where we are "opening ourselves to each other, levels of intimacy, and large and sometimes dispersed solidarity" (1), to levels of the political, which Lugones describes broadly as encompassing "the manyness of the past and present by both dominators and those

resisting domination” (4). Driving her scholarship is a “commitment against utopianism,” which she finds exists when there is no means of resistance; instead, she tells her reader

to live differently in the present, to think and act against the grain of oppression. I write from the belief that it is only from that ground that the next possibility can be entertained socially, at the edge of realism. My perspective is in the midst of people mindful to the tensions, desires, closures, cracks, and openings that make up the social. (5)

As a decolonial scholar, Lugones is attentive to what she calls “active subjectivity,” which she theorizes as neither presupposing an individual subject, nor a collective intentionality, but rather outlined through “a consciousness by a moving with people,” wherein intentionality is derived from “paying attention to people and to the enormously variegated ways of connection among people without privileging the word or a monological understanding of sense” (6).

Lugones is particularly concerned with the ways in which we, as scholars, tend to overly assert our agency as we “move with others” (6). Thus, her project works to identify ways in which we can safeguard against:

falling into a politics of the same, a politics that values  
or assumes sameness or homogeneity;  
without mythologizing place;  
attempting to stand in the cracks and intersections of multiple  
histories of domination and resistances to dominations? (Lugones 6-7)

Building from this concern, Lugones offers faithful witnessing as a means of moving away from universal or monosensical systems. In contrast to collaborators, who witness on the side of power, Lugones argues that faithful witnessing occurs “against the grain of power, on the side of resistance” (7). She continues by instructing that to witness faithfully, we

must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. (7)

While Lugones cautions us that faithful witnessing is difficult because it requires us to navigate through hard to detect “oppressive and fragmenting meanings” (7), it is also a role which allows us to engage innumerable possibilities for coalition because it approaches the subject as plural, many. Lugones specifically cites bicultural people as those who have to navigate the role of victim and dominant, wading through the disparate desires, traits, thoughts, emotions, and performances which “are different in one reality than in the other” (57).

In relationship to my project, Lugones also argues that liberatory possibility lies within memory and “readings of history that reveal unified historical lines as enacting dominations through both linearity and erasure” (58-59). Liberation, then, is possible only by acknowledging the many worlds which we might occupy, accepting bodily multiplicity wherein we occupy spaces as both oppressed and oppressor. Lugones argues that “the task of remembering one’s many selves is a difficult liberatory task” (59). She continues, “Self-deception and mystification are among the many forms of control of our memory of our other selves. All oppressive control is violent because it attempts to erase selves that we are that are dangerous to the maintenance of domination over us” (59). Yet, echoing the work of scholars like Anzaldúa, Pérez, and Sandoval, who argue for the possibility of liberation in an interstitial space, Lugones contends that one has the clearest critical perspective on all worlds by inhabiting the “limen, the place in between realities,

a gap ‘between and betwixt’ universes of sense that construe social life and persons differently, an interstice” (59). Lugones argues that this space, and the capacity it grants for recognition of our own multiplicity, also allows the formation of “liberatory syllogisms” from other worlds to “attempt to make actual in the worlds in which one is oppressed” (59). Yet, again, Lugones cautions us that these syllogisms cannot transfer, and she states that the oppressed “know themselves in realities in which they are able to form intentions that are not among the alternatives that are possible in the world in which they are brutalized and oppressed” (59). We see this in Burgos’s poetry as contextualized against her life. Though she was able to theorize her liberation, moving from the nostalgic containment of her world toward an inward space of reflection and embodied wholeness through her writing, Burgos’s ability to theorize from a “third space” did not manifest in material alteration of her positionalities.

Lugones accounts for this thusly, “Merely remembering ourselves in other worlds and coming to understand ourselves as multiplicitous is not enough for liberation: collective struggle in the reconstruction and transformation of structures is fundamental” (62). Therefore, we might read Burgos as the forebear of the collective; her writing gives voice to her oppression and creates a path toward liberation from her interstitial perspective. Yet, in her moment, Burgos is alone in giving voice to the weight of her oppression. Indeed, Lugones notes the collective is “born of dialogue among multiplicitous persons who are faithful witnesses of themselves and also testify to, and uncover the multiplicity of their oppressors and the techniques of oppression afforded by ignoring that multiplicity” (62). As noted in previous chapters, even among her Puerto Rican

contemporaries who also rejected US imperialism, Burgos was surrounded by adherents to a nostalgic nationalist identity. As this nostalgia actively worked to discipline and silence Burgos, it was not an identity to which she had access. Only allowed to fully exist in the interstice, Burgos bore faithful witness to the multiplicity of her oppressors out of necessity. However, as her (male) peers had the luxury of engaging in colonial nostalgia as a means of resistance, they were incapable of joining or participating with Burgos in her collective struggle. Still, as I shift to my analysis of how Carmen Rivera melds performance with the role of faithful witness in commemorating Burgos, I do so by asserting that the efforts of Rivera and others to intimately engage Burgos's memory within an interstitial space play an integral role in continuing Burgos's project for Puertorriqueña liberation.

### **Memory as Performance, Performance as Memory**

Carmen Rivera's play *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water* was first staged by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York on May 12, 1999. The first production was eventually videotaped for the archives at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts (Rivera, *Child of Water*, 83). It was directed by Manuel Martin and starred Sol Miranda and Lourdes Martin as Julia de Burgos and the WOMAN, respectively. Because the show has long since finished its run, I initially attempted to view this videotaped first-run production of the play. I discovered that the Library's copy was currently unavailable as they transition their video cassette recordings to DVD. For the purposes of my current project, I am relying on selections of a recorded performance of a 2014 Centennial production, directed by Carmen Rivera's husband Cándido Tirado at the Bernie West



Theater. This was Tirado's second production of the play in 2014, as he had previously participated in one of the 5-City Choral readings to honor the centennial of Julia de Burgos's birth on February 16-17, 2014 (Rivera 1). Tirado's Choral reading took place in New York City at the Teatro Círculo; the other cities involved in this commemoration were Chicago, Buffalo, New Haven, and San Juan. Of note, in its original run, *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water* was performed in English on weekday showings and in Spanish on the weekends (Bruckner E5). Tirado's 2014 staging is performed in English. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, I analyze the English-language version, referencing Rivera's published script when relevant. Yet, in moving forward, I consider Taylor's words that the repertoire, the fluid performance of embodied memory, "requires presence" (20). I take to heart her conceptualization of presence as a space where "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission" (20). While I find it useful and important to analyze the available recording of the staged performance of Rivera's play, I also acknowledge the limitations of experiencing it solely in a relatively archived, static form.

### **Creative Context**

In her acknowledgments for the play, Carmen Rivera begins by describing her fear in approaching this commemorative project. After being commissioned by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Rivera writes that she was "overwhelmed with joy, then quickly terror set in" (81). Her fear was based in the fact that Burgos remains an icon in the Puerto Rican community. As Rivera notes, Burgos is a "Puerto Rican and Feminist SHero and literary genius. How would I be able to dramatize her life? At the beginning of the

writing process I was paralyzed for several months” (81). Rivera dedicated months of her life seeking to understand who Julia de Burgos was, meeting Burgos on her own terms. Rivera describes the process of locating Julia as a complex woman: “As I studied her poetry, interviewed people who knew her and scholars who researched her work, I slowly discovered a human being underneath all the layers of her mythology. Julia, the Woman emerged” (81). Rivera continues, outlining the various facets of Julia the Woman: one “angry at the cruelties of the world;” who “believed that Social Justice and Freedom were basic human rights;” who “loved too deeply;” who “loved laughing and didn’t stop herself from crying;” and who “saw, felt and heard all too clearly” (81). Rivera argues that the many complexities of Burgos “plagued her and caused her to doubt her gift,” and that “as witnessed through her work, she (Burgos) could never reconcile the Woman with the Artist” (81). From this understanding, Rivera constructs her memory of Burgos. She writes: “I posit that these two sides of her psyche where frequently at odds throughout her lifetime. Once this level of consciousness opened up for me, JULIA DE BURGOS: CHILD OF WATER began to take shape” (81).

*Child of Water* is spread over two acts, with 18 scenes divided equally between both acts. The play is set primarily at the end of Julia de Burgos’s life in 1953, though Julia and the WOMAN move through scenes of dramatized memories in Burgos’s life, beginning as early as 1929 with a final conversation between Julia and her mother. In her set directions, Rivera writes that it must be “surrealist and minimalist” as the play occurs “in a world between life and death, and the set must reflect this and NOT be grounded in a realistic way” (3, emphasis Rivera’s). As another production note, Rivera writes that

“lights will be very important for the play in invoking the surreal nether world that Julia de Burgos finds herself in” (3). This in-between space is critical in invoking themes found in Burgos’s poetry, and it allows Rivera to interrogate the ways in which Burgos wrestled with and within the division between the public-facing persona and the poet crying out for liberation. Rivera is highly cognizant of this division, and she situates the play within that struggle, where Julia confronts and is confronted by her soul in the guise of the WOMAN character. Having duly described the character WOMAN as Julia’s Soul (4), Rivera describes the interactions between Julia and her soul (through the embodied WOMAN) as a search for “integration and peace” only possible in the break between “time and space...in the chasm between life and death” (3).

### **Analysis**

As a guiding essence throughout the play, Rivera scripts a Voice-Over character who interjects lines from Burgos’s poetry to frame the performance. The Voice-Over is described as “Julia’s voice in the infinite,” though Rivera writes that if “voice-overs cannot be recorded; they may be performed by the Soul” (4). In the 2014 Tirado production, poems from the infinite are performed by WOMAN. As Act 1, Scene 1 begins, most of the stage lights are down, save one, shining on the WOMAN. She is standing behind one of the dark, scribbled panels, which in this scene is revealed to be transparent. The lighting against the panel creates the effect of shattered glass, an intimation to the audience that the performance is staged in a ruptured world, in the in-between. The WOMAN recites lines from Burgos’s poem “Agua, vida y tierra” [Water,

Life & Earth], setting the stage for what the audience is about to witness. Quietly, languidly, the WOMAN, as the infinite, states:

I was a strong outburst of the forest and river, and as a voice between two echoes, I climbed the hills. From one side the water's hands stretched towards me, and the mountain's roots took hold of me from the other. From there my voice of the present, bare of language, spreads over the world as it came from the earth. ("Julia and Woman" Act 1, Scene 1, 00:00:06-00:00:24)

The light dims and briefly goes black. From this opening scene, Rivera and Tirado welcome the audience into the rupture, where Burgos's voice is experienced as she herself imagined its greatest potency, unbound from the constraints of her contextual vocabulary, free to engage the present, "bare of language."

Following our first introduction to the infinite voice of Burgos, coughing echoes through the theater as another light comes up on the stage. Behind a different transparent panel, a different woman, Julia, is bent over. She is wearing a hospital gown, and she is gasping for air as she coughs. Between coughing fits, she is panicked, her movements frantic as she clutches her hands to her face. She is loudly talking to herself as she states: "They think they can keep me locked up... They can't do that...they don't know who I am! I'm not going back! Okay I gotta get to..." (00:00:25-00:00:41). As her voices trails off, she stumbles from behind the panel, bent over and coughing, and she emerges onto the center of the stage. More stage lights come up, though they are initially dim and cast blue shadows on Julia. As she moves farther out on the stage, the stage lights also become brighter. A wheelchair is visible on stage, a nod to the many hospitalizations Burgos underwent immediately prior to her death from complications with pneumonia. Julia continues to cough and turns her back to the audience, screaming, "I hope they're

gone! Leave me alone! I'm not going back!" (00:00:41-00:00:50). The scene progresses as Julia is frightened, crying as she moves across the stage, searching for a river. She moves around the stage, alternately screaming and crying. The scene ends with Julia, clearly disconcerted, attempting to discover if she is alive or dead.

As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the circumstances of Burgos's death play a large role in maintaining her mythic status. The fascination with her death also often serves to frame academic forays into her life; thus, there is little surprise that Rivera would begin her play at Julia's end. Given the public fascination with Burgos's untimely death, it is critical that Rivera utilize a cultural moment of recognition in remembering Burgos. Yet, where Burgos's demise often outstretches her contribution, Rivera uses this juncture, the nether space between life and death, to introduce her audience to Burgos. Returning to Calafell's reading of Muñoz, I consider how Rivera negotiates the myth of Burgos. Rivera builds from the identification her audience members might have with the story of Burgos's death, but she disrupts the common narrative. Rather than portraying Burgos's death as the end of her story, or even the springboard to an embellished mythic status, Rivera disidentifies with common readings of Burgos's life and instead uses it to welcome her audience into the intimate spaces between the lines of Burgos's life, history, and writing. Regarding disidentification, Calafell writes of the power of the "anti-normative effect, compounded by our feelings of estrangement" in creating community (27). While Calafell discusses difference and disidentification in the broader sense of Latinidad, Rivera works through this process on a more intimate, micro level as she

works to make new meaning with her audience. Through this act, Rivera is creating space for the audience to engage Burgos on a new plane, absent of nostalgia or myth.

Burgos's death is not the only space where Rivera taps into vernacular perceptions of Burgos. She also incorporates the notion of Burgos as the broken-hearted woman whose talent is spoiled or diminished because of her lost love, Juan Isidro Jimenés Grullon.

While Rivera taps into a common trope, that of the jilted woman marked for poverty and death, she reconstructs it in a way that recenters the split between Julia and her soul, embodied by WOMAN. In Act 2, Scene 1, described at the outset of this chapter, the WOMAN performs "A Julia de Burgos." Of note, where the script directions call for the WOMAN to recite the poem before Burgos comes on stage, Tirado's production has the WOMAN speaking directly to Burgos while she recites. With pages in her hand, the WOMAN moves toward Burgos, then the audience, as Burgos looks away from her, ashamed, sometimes toeing the ground with her foot, sometimes clutching the shawl tighter. As the recitation continues, the WOMAN again turns toward Burgos, and her voice becomes sharper, angry. She begins to move swiftly toward Burgos as she states, "You do *not* govern yourself; *everyone* governs you" ("Julia de Burgos," Act 2, Scene 1, 00:01:40-00:01:42).<sup>6</sup> Once she reaches Burgos, the WOMAN bends over her, almost menacingly, raising her voice as she lists the people and things to whom Burgos is beholden: "your husband, your parents, your relatives, the priest, the dressmaker, the theater, the casino, the car, your jewels, the banquet, champagne..." As the list goes on,

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis added to reflect WOMAN's pointed tone for these words.

the WOMAN becomes louder, eventually shouting “HEAVEN AND HELL” into Burgos’s face (00:01:43-00:01:54). The WOMAN then pulls back, lowers her voice, and mocks Julia and her concern for “society’s ‘what will they say?’” (00:01:54-00:01:57). She then pivots and walks away as she proclaims: “Not me, only my heart rules me, only my thoughts.” The WOMAN walks to stage right, turns back to face Julia, and she again raises her voice, points to her chest, and says “The one who rules in me is I” (00:01:50-00:02:04).

As the WOMAN moves into the next stanzas, Julia begins to react. She is no longer looking away, passive or ashamed. She starts interjecting lines like “Stop it!” and “What the hell are you doing?” The WOMAN continues through the poem’s end, and there is canned applause (also noted in the script) which causes Julia to rise from her seat and confront the WOMAN, yelling, “STOP IT!” Julia then turns to the audience and angrily points around the room “All of you! Stop it!” (00:02:34-00:02:54). The two women then face one another and begin to argue. Julia blames the WOMAN for ruining her life, ripping pages from WOMAN’s hands as Julia yells at her to leave and to never read her poems again. The WOMAN reminds Julia that she tried to separate from her before: “You tried to throw me away, and you tried to destroy us. I have a right!” Julia tells her “You have no right” and that she does not want to live her life with the WOMAN. As the WOMAN begs Julia to let her back in, Julia crumples the pages and throws them down, turning away from the WOMAN. WOMAN follows her, speaking to her back, “You had your chance to live your life. Were you happy, peaceful?” Here, the WOMAN (and Rivera) turn to Burgos’s love affair with Grullon. But rather than centering the love story

as the cause of Burgos's downfall, Rivera implies it was instead Burgos's choice to split from her soul which left her abandoned and destitute. In rejecting her soul to make her lover happy, Julia is reminded that her capitulation to Grullon's demands, namely that she give up her writing and perform a more submissive, "womanly" role, gained her nothing. The WOMAN tells Julia: "That was not living, you were broken" (00:03:03-00:04:23).

Rivera's play frequently weaves Burgos's own words into familiar narratives. While the scene above is just one of the contentious interactions between Julia and the WOMAN, it is representative of the way in which Rivera bears faithful witness to Burgos's struggle as a diasporic woman, subject to the trauma of migration while continuously navigating dual repressive expectations within the United States and within the patriarchal nostalgia of her peers and lover. As Yomaira Figueroa notes, faithful witnessing "challenges singular narratives or dominant perspectives," and within this process "understands that there are many worlds, that sees/reads many perspectives, particularly the perspectives of those who are dehumanized or rendered invisible" (643). Rivera's narrative decision to embody both Julia and her soul, depicting their struggle in a surrealistic interstitial space, reveals a highly cognizant level of engagement with Burgos's poetry and the embodied resistance revealed throughout. Rivera dissects the split persona in much the same ways as Burgos does, and ultimately, they reach the same conclusion: liberation can only become possibility by turning inward, engaging the struggle at its most intimate level.



Yet, where Burgos served as a forebear in this struggle, Rivera's role is essential in moving beyond the first step of multiplicitous self-recognition described by María Lugones. As noted above, Lugones cautioned that recognition is not enough for liberation; liberation requires a collective struggle, built through the dialogue of faithful witnesses who acknowledge their own experience and also "testify to" others who dwell in a space of multiplicity (Lugones 62). Through her play, Rivera uses performance to testify to Burgos's vision of liberation, while also drawing her audience into the collective.

In the final two scenes of the play, Julia and the WOMAN negotiate Julia's farewell. In Act 2, Scene 8, nearing her end, Julia has returned to the hospital. This is depicted by her redonning the hospital gown from the first scene of the play. In the script, Rivera notes that this scene takes place in 1953. As the scene progresses, we can tell Julia and the WOMAN have reconciled. They are facing one another, embracing arm in arm, as Julia laughs to herself and recites fragments of verse from her poem "Después" [After]: "When everything awakens the lilies will announce it...they will say: 'It is the fatal conscience of that girl, she had many sins because she always lived in verse...'" The WOMAN smiles as she tells Julia, "I hope they will all say that." The WOMAN, too, recites a verse from "Réplica" [Rejoinder]: "You will always be a poem, Julia de Burgos, the one that has nothing of a bourgeois, the one that breaks centuries in her clothes, and frees her life through the stars!" The WOMAN pointedly tells Julia, "That was all you!" Julia smiles and tells her: "Us." "Us," the WOMAN happily echoes (00:00:09-00:00:28).

Here, Rivera joins the two, body and soul reunited, but also two voices amplifying Burgos's call for liberation.

As the scene continues, Julia again recites verse as the WOMAN takes the hospital gown off her body, revealing a nude dress. The WOMAN folds the hospital gown and she and Julia grab an end and carry the gown toward the back of the stage; the lights dim, leaving only one spotlight on both women. They lay the gown on the stage, symbolizing Julia's death. They maintain eye contact as Julia continues to cite verses from "Adiós en Welfare Island." With the final lines in the scene, the WOMAN looks unflinchingly at Julia, and she recites verse from "A plena desnudez" [In Total Nudity]: "One day I will go to dance with you to a faraway place where no law exists, nor reason rules; where the water is breeze, where the bird is flower; where everything pure and natural is fused in God's grace" (00:00:47-00:01:18). Yet, where the script calls for an end of scene, and a slow dimming of lights as a recognition of Julia's passing, Tirado's production transitions seamlessly into the final scene of the play. As the WOMAN finishes reciting the lines, she and Julia stand, hold hands and walk, together, to the center of the stage, crossing into a new plane.

In the background, there is a recorded sound of birds twittering, along with a low rush of water. The WOMAN and Julia stand hand in hand, and the WOMAN tells Julia that she is home. Julia has returned to the Rio Grande de Loíza. It is in this final scene where Rivera breaks the fourth wall when Julia acknowledges the audience's presence, asking: "Who are all these people?" The WOMAN laughs as she tells Julia: "They came to the river for you." As Julia remains confused, the WOMAN tells her it is a tribute, "a tribute

for your life...it's time to go now Julia.” However, Julia remains still, staring at the audience. She admonishes the audience: “Don’t remember me!” The WOMAN, too, addresses the audience, revealing her reunified spirit with Julia’s body, as she urges them: “Feel me!” (00:01:14-00:01:58).

In watching these women play to the audience, even once-removed from the participatory experience, I reflect back on Calafell’s call to “feel” the text in an embodied way. Within this performance, Rivera’s understanding of and approach to remembering Burgos springs from a similar sentiment. In reflecting on Boym’s diasporic intimacy, it is clear that there is no sense of nostalgia in Rivera’s commemoration. The narrative she seeks to tell is drawn directly from Burgos’s embodied discourse, and there is an underlying kinship between the two writers which illuminates a shared understanding of the impermanence and trauma associated with diasporic subjectivity. As the WOMAN (and Rivera) call the audience to “feel,” Rivera is also illustrating the power of performance in constructing memory from a decolonial space.

Rivera adheres to Figueroa’s call for a decolonial attitude, wherein Rivera recognizes the dual nature of performance. Rivera is not only building memory performance for an audience of participatory observers, but she is also performing the role of witness through that memory construction. Contrary to the flat Burgos narrative presented by the USPS, which neither anticipates a diasporic audience, nor generates any sense of self-recognition in the observer, Rivera’s narrative adheres to the concept of faithful witnessing as articulated by Lugones. Rivera herself describes the process of coming to this project, sitting with Burgos’s words as she waded through the “fragments” to create a

tribute to Burgos (81). In this way, Rivera faithfully witnesses by refuting “unified historical lines” of erasure (Lugones 59), doing the work to “sense resistance” within Burgos’s poetry (7). While the play is only loosely biographical, it is a faithful commemoration in its adherence to Burgos’s search for liberation, working diligently to locate meaning within the ruptures of Burgos’s life.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this project, I have sought to engage the connection between memory and a notion of *puertorriqueñidad* as a resistive collective identity formed within the fragmented space of colonial subjectivity. Building from a historical understanding of how colonization and US imperialism have devastated the people of Puerto Rico in material ways—economically, socially, culturally—I have been invested in understanding how memory, theorized through the body, has allowed some Puertorriqueña subjects to use art and performance as means of constructing a decolonial identity outside/within the confines of colonial/imperial power structures. Within my study, I found that analyzing the remnants or “essence” of a violently displaced, colonized collective demands examining embodied intersectional identities. This embodiment is at the core of how resistive actors like Burgos self-define.

Thus, it was with great consternation that I confronted the reality that many state-driven public memory projects not only sanitize the lived trauma of their subjects, but also remove notions of the body entirely. As I argued in Chapter 3, the colonization of Puerto Rico is a continued process, aided and abetted through the circulation of “multicultural” state narratives, as witnessed in the case of the USPS Julia de Burgos

stamp. Puerto Rican women like Burgos, at least within the dominant, national narrative, remain subject to erasure and/or silencing. As a result, this dominant frame also silences Burgos's vision of liberation from both US imperialism and the legacy of Spanish colonialism.

To combat the overarching, state narrative of Burgos, I turned to her own words in Chapter 4. I analyzed how Burgos utilizes *autohistoria-teoría* in her poetry, building a liberated decolonial imaginary through the use of an embodied "I" to conceptualize a path of liberation within a fragmented third space. Rejecting the oppression of nostalgia, Burgos's decolonial imaginary invokes a diasporic subject always pushing toward transformation in the unknown. For Burgos, memory is not constrained in the past; it is a space of possibility opened up by rejecting normative limitations in the present and envisioning a future absent of the shackles of colonially-inscribed excesses and erasures. In this space, memory comes from and through the body, and it is an intimate process that requires self-recognition. Yet, while I argue that Burgos was successful in creating a language of liberation through her poetry, I also find that material liberation requires a collective of faithful witnesses. Thus, in this chapter, I have examined Carmen Rivera's commemoration of Julia de Burgos through performance. By reading Rivera's play against a public memory project which flattens multidimensional people like Burgos, I argue Rivera performs decolonial memory in a way that models how we, as scholars, can more ethically engage how figures like Burgos negotiate and theorize their identities under oppressive systems.

Notably, as a model for decolonial memory, Rivera's understanding of memory is inherently tied to the ways in which narrative can both build or erase communal identity. Rivera is particularly aware of the importance of narrative in constructing identity within the Puerto Rican diaspora. Thus, in drawing from Ruth Trinidad Galván's work, I argue that Rivera's lived experience informs her role as dual witness. Galvan argues "underscoring the collective memory of colonization and oppression," while also "foregrounding the knowledge the female brown body possesses," is critical in "decentering dominant epistemologies" (348). Rivera privileges Burgos's embodied knowledge throughout the play. Moreover, she builds from this knowledge to construct a collective within her audience. By including the familiar narratives and myths which are associated with Burgos, Rivera credibly generates a space of negotiation within Burgos's memory. She decenters the power of these myths by focusing attention on the ways in which Burgos manifested a split persona to navigate systems of oppression.

Generations removed, Rivera's play echoes Burgos's embodied struggles, amplifying her excesses by physically embodying her spirit, while also demonstrating the difficulty of reconciling the multiplicity of systemic expectations placed on a diasporic woman of color. In this way, Rivera invites her audience into an intimate space both to unlearn traditional Burgos narratives and to delink from the nostalgia Burgos herself rejected. In Muñoz's terms, Rivera works to help her audience collectively disidentify with these myths, accessing a "transformative politics" which "enables subjects and groups to imagine" (161). In this process, Rivera models how performance can disentangle memory, and memory scholarship, from universal, singular narratives. Meeting Burgos

on her own terms by witnessing through performance, Rivera crafts a decolonial memory project which amplifies Burgos's call for collective liberation.

## **Chapter 6: Reflections on My (Lapsed) Rhetorical Studies Identity**

As I have worked through this dissertation, I have taken a calculated risk.

I was introduced to decolonization as an ethical and essential methodological paradigm in the summer prior to entering my doctoral program. Having had the opportunity to hear lectures by and engage the writing of decolonial theorists like Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Ramón Grosfoguel, my previous coursework in rhetorical studies was upended. Following this experience, I became less concerned with mastering genres of critique for public address, and instead turned to rhetorical scholarship which operated from the margins (or entirely outside) the discipline. Scholars like Calafell, who pushed the boundaries of rhetorical studies by introducing new disciplinary paradigms, and Wanzer-Serrano, who openly called for a sweeping epistemic shift within the discipline, appealed to me because I knew I could find my voice within their visions of what rhetorical studies could be. By building from their foundations, I could ethically perform the type of scholarship I wanted to do, and I could account for and reduce my own entanglements when engaging subjects like Julia de Burgos. Yet, I also knew that choosing this path would inevitably result in having to reengage the many questions that have dogged me since I entered rhetorical studies: Why is this significant? Have you ever considered that there is a reason no one is analyzing this person's



rhetoric? Couldn't you just cite (insert any of our canonical theorists)? Can you find some way to connect this to the public sphere? But, really, why should anyone care about this?

Despite my best efforts, these questions inform the disciplinary lessons that have been the most difficult for me to unlearn. Thus, when I was in the preliminary phase of this memory project, I began with the public memory scholars one typically associates with rhetorical studies. I diligently worked through the scholarship I knew I would be expected to know: combing the pages of Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, critically examining Vivian's various works on memory, dissecting all of Phillips' projects. Yet even where these scholars acknowledged the limitations of rhetorical memory studies, or advocated for scholarship which built from Zelizer's processual, fluid articulation of collective memory, there was an unspoken lapse or absence for which I couldn't quite account. So I moved on, finding scholarship which felt more comfortable, more familiar. I examined Latina/o and Chicana/o rhetorical scholarship which focused on *testimonio*. Reading the works of Delgado, Hasian, Holling, and Avant-Mier, I felt myself moving closer to what I needed to examine the work and life of Julia de Burgos. The role of narrative and witnessing were more fruitful grounds for helping me meet Burgos on her own terms.

Yet, I needed something else, something which helped me theorize memory as an embodied performance, while also explicitly acknowledging how such performances begin from the cracks, from the lived experiences of women who, through the violence of colonization and continued processes of coloniality, have been shunted to places and spaces where they must construct memory as a means of survival. For this, I began with Lisa Flores's Chicana feminist home space, and I moved outward. I examined how

Calafell used performance writing to theorize and negotiate memory, community, and identity. Under her helpful guidance, I was able to identify other queer of color performance scholars and Chicana, Latina, and Black feminist theorists and writers who were already theorizing from within an interstitial space. I returned to my interest in decolonization and decolonial scholarship, and I found home in Emma Pérez's decolonial imaginary, Gloria Anzaldúa's *nepantla*, and Chela Sandoval's differential consciousness. Moreover, I found a vocabulary to articulate what I wanted my project to be. In turning to the work of María Lugones, I knew that faithful witnessing offered me a path to perform method without subsuming or universalizing the narratives of the women I hoped to engage.

Thus, the scholarship I have chosen to interrogate in this dissertation, and, perhaps even more importantly, the scholarship I've chosen *not* to include, was not a decision arrived at lightly. As stated, I am aware that it was a risk to construct a memory dissertation within the confines of rhetorical studies without exhaustively conferring with the familiar names. But this choice was neither one of dismissiveness nor of disregard for the value of said scholarship. Rather, it springs from an intentional decision to choose the theories which were best and most ethically suited for a decolonial memory study of Julia de Burgos. As I hope I have illustrated, interrogating Burgos requires significant understanding of the legacies of colonization in dictating value and worth through the intersectional positionalities of the colonized woman's body. Beyond that, it also requires a vocabulary to engage the body as a site of resistive and creative memory. For colonized women of color, negotiation of oppression does not occur by seeking to navigate public

spaces; as noted by Mary Brady, the public and private are irrelevant concerns in the colonized context. Colonized women of color do not have access to even the conversation of public/private; thus, their recognition, transgression, and transcendence are performed entirely through bodies which are never fully recognized in their material worlds (Lugones). Understanding how women like Burgos can even begin to theorize liberation, then, requires reading narrative, experience, and memory through the body, engaging pluriversal methods and foundations outside of the current scope of rhetorical studies.

Within my project, then, I choose to focus on the work of scholars who, like Julia de Burgos, have built theory and method from lived experience, building knowledge from the body and its localized contexts. I argue that this epistemic decision is a decolonial one. By choosing to delink from those knowledges which are expected, but which also negate and erase the very subject I wish to interrogate and the arguments I hope to make, I am working and theorizing from within my own lived experience to join the collective of scholars who already inhabit a decolonial imaginary. Rather than weighted obligation, it is with gratitude that I turn to the work of scholars like Calafell, Delgado, Flores, and Wanzer-Serrano. By following their examples, I am committed to building vocabularies which embrace pluriversal knowledges. I am committed to theorizing from and through the body, decentering the claims of coloniality. I am committed to bearing faithful witness to the ways in which rhetorical studies seeks to suppress these endeavors, by only hinting at a desire to recenter the margins.

I acknowledge that this is a risky academic endeavor, but it is also a vital one.

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