

**The colonial gaze:
Colonial discourse in U.S. and Puerto Rican newspapers**

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the _____thesis_____entitled

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ABSTRACT

The aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico unveiled for many the colonial power of the U.S. in Puerto Rico. The natural disaster became a financial and public health problem in part due to laws that limit the scope of actions that Puerto Rico has in response to emergencies. This thesis analyses the media coverage following the natural disaster in September 2017 up to the local elections in January 2020. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach and postcolonial theory, this study examines colonial discourse in two major newspapers one in the United States (USA Today) and one in Puerto Rico (El Nuevo Día). By exploring the intersection between postcolonial and communication studies, this thesis aims to demonstrate how the newspapers reflects and reinforces power imbalances between the US-PR. This study situates the texts within the broader social structures and power relations at play. Finally, this thesis provides examples of resistance and anticolonial sentiments that emerged and analyzes their portrayal in the news media outlets.

KEYWORDS: Puerto Rico, colonial discourse, news discourse, discourse analysis, ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, resistance, national consciousness

Introduction

The aftermath of Hurricane Maria in September 2017 exposed Puerto Rico's colonial crisis. The natural disaster exacerbated the island's financial and public health problems in part due to laws that limit the scope of actions that Puerto Rico has in response to emergencies (Rodríguez-Díaz, 2018). The resulting lack of political agency and the slow federal recovery efforts led to mediated public discussions about the U.S.-PR colonial relationship. As noted by Puerto Rican writer Ana Teresa Toro in the New York Times opinion piece: "That was the great revelation that Maria had for us: we finally know what kind of country we had, a poor colony that lived a mirage for more than sixty years" (Toro, 2017, para. 15). This thesis aims to examine how colonial discourse was perpetuated or counteracted in the newspapers' coverage from the time of this "revelation," up to the 2020 elections. Using postcolonial theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this thesis will analyze the dominant narratives in two major newspapers: USA Today (United States) and El Nuevo Día (Puerto Rico). By doing so, this research aims to shed light on the contemporary manifestations of colonial discourse as seen in the newspapers. This study seeks to provide valuable insight into the role of public discourse and media institutions in defining and maintaining U.S.-PR colonial relations.

Puerto Rico's and other U.S. territories' lack of self-determination and sovereignty continues to be studied among postcolonial, and anticolonial scholars (Fuste, 2014). Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in 1898, as a result of the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War (Dietz, 1976). The colonial status of Puerto Rico took a new turn in 1952 with the creation of a "Commonwealth status" that granted certain economic and political power to the island (Atilés-Osoria, 2016). Although this law managed to distinguish Puerto Rico's status from a classical model of colonialism, the U.S. continued exercising

sovereignty on the island. “Puerto Rico has been locked into the same socio-legal and political situation since 1898, when it was invaded by the US and a state of exception was imposed to support the colonial administration” (Atilés-Osoria, 2016, pg. 224). Most recently, the approved Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) by the Congress of the United States in 2016 reaffirmed colonialism by showcasing the lack of authority by the local government (Cabán, 2017).

Puerto Rico’s colonial status is also reflected in the island’s main political parties which were established in direct response to the status issue. The Popular Democratic Party (PPD, in Spanish), which supports the commonwealth status; the New Progressive Party (PNP, in Spanish), which advocates for statehood; and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP, in Spanish), which seeks independence. These three contrasting viewpoints of Puerto Rico’s political future reveal the ongoing struggles and tensions resulting from colonialism on the island. Additionally, to date, Puerto Rico has held six non-binding referendums for Puerto Ricans to express their preference for status. While political devolutions or referendums on political status have been utilized in other countries (Veenendaal, 2015; Prinsen, 2017; Ferdinand, 2020), the Puerto Rico plebiscites have been non-binding because the power to change Puerto Rico’s political future lies with the U.S. Congress and not Puerto Rican residents. “The Congress shall have the Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States . . .”, reads the Constitution (Constitution, Article IV, sec. 3, clause 2). The absence of self-determination in Puerto Rico has resulted in ongoing debates and discussions about the island’s political future.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States was laid bare and colonialism appeared in the public discourse as a political crisis. Puerto Rican citizens and politicians from all three dominant political parties

described Puerto Rico as a “colony” amidst the island’s ongoing political and economic challenges faced as a territory of the United States. While the PIP reiterated its independence and anticolonial claims, many politicians and advocates from the PNP and PPD disregarded the U.S.’s role in perpetuating the colonial relationship. Although politicians from the PPD, who historically have been in favor of the current “Commonwealth” status, started to advocate for greater autonomy for Puerto Rico they excluded independence as an option. In contrast, the PNP, in favor of statehood, embraced anti-colonial sentiments that, contrary to most anticolonial movements, sought annexation rather than decolonization. They reinforced that Puerto Ricans are American citizens and created the slogan “The colony kills you, vote yes [for statehood]” to urge Puerto Ricans to vote yes for statehood in the non-binding plebiscite that took place in the 2020 elections. Despite all three parties sharing a common opposition to colonialism, the dominant political parties, the PNP and the PPD, did not directly challenge the U.S.’s role in maintaining colonialism. The failure of these main parties to publicly challenge the U.S. role in the colonial regime can be partly due to their commitment to maintaining some form of political relationship with the United States. At the same time, this blind spot by local politicians’ sheds light on the impact of the discursive practices employed by the U.S. to establish and uphold colonialism.

Colonial discourse plays a significant role in how the colonial relationship is constructed and maintained, as well as the colonial subject’s understanding of this relationship. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said (1978) argued that colonialism is not just a form of military rule but also a discourse of domination. This thesis will explore how the United States uses discourse to create and promote Puerto Rican cultural and racial differences, justifying unequal treatment and the supposed need for assistance from the mainland. These distinctions created by colonial discourse between the colonizer “Self” and the colonial subject “Other” are based on real or imagined distinctions to justify interventions

(Bhabha, 2012). The Puerto Rican difference is often articulated in conservative terms as utterly alien, while in liberal terms, Puerto Ricans are seen as assimilable but yet in need of “help” from the American empire. In both discussions, the role of the U.S. in the political and economic situation in Puerto Rico is dismissed. In their own way, these two notions have served to justify the U.S. interventions on the island, emphasizing the idea that without the link to the U.S., such interventions would be impossible.

As Bhabha (2012) noted, colonial discourse is ambivalent because it creates and perpetuates clear distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized, yet it also produces situations where these distinctions are blurred, reversed, or subverted. Scholars have already identified that U.S. law towards Puerto Ricans is ambivalent in the constitutional codification of Puerto Ricans as “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense” (Thompson, 1898, p.102). While U.S. citizenship granted Puerto Ricans certain rights, exclusive “limitations” demonstrate the inseparable tie of colonialism and racism (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021), ultimately positioning Puerto Ricans as “Latin domestic and racial other” (Sandoval, 2008, p.82). Nathaniel Córdova's (2008) analysis of Congress’s official recollection of Puerto Rico’s history highlights how the current Commonwealth was marketed as a solution to Puerto Rico’s political status, offering greater autonomy to the Islanders, while still maintaining ties with the United States. Córdova suggests that the “narrow focus” on a supposed and idyllic quest for decolonization reinscribed and normalized the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship along the axis of a “flexible colonialism.” This ambivalent part of the U.S. -Puerto Rico colonial system is reproduced in the discourse with seemingly contradictory narratives of exclusion and inclusion. The discourse surrounding Commonwealth left many Puerto Ricans feeling like “incomplete colonial subjects,” as their experiences under colonialism are not fully represented in the official discourse of supposed Puerto Rican sovereignty. Córdova's analysis shows how discussions highlight how Puerto Rico’s status is not solely legal or

politically ambivalent but it is also deeply tied to questions of identity, history/memory, and sovereignty.

Duany (2000) suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity within the context of colonialism has led Puerto Ricans to develop a unique hybrid cultural identity that transcends political structures. “Local observers have noted that even though Puerto Rico has become increasingly dependent on the U.S. economy, its cultural identity is now stronger than ever” (Duany, 2000). He suggests that Puerto Ricans have not been fully absorbed into the U.S. culture, creating a transnational cultural nation that bridges Puerto Rico and the mainland. While many nations are primarily political nations, Puerto Rico is a cultural nation “on the move,” according to Duany (2000). However, colonialism still shapes Puerto Ricans’ self-identification. According to Bhabha, the ambivalence in colonial discourse destabilizes the binary oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized when it leads to the emergence of the hybrid self-identification in the “in-between.” In this sense, the negation and contestation of colonial discourse results in the formation of a new hybrid identity. In a similar vein, Gamaliel-Ramos (2004) suggest that both the perspective of mainland rules and local politicians shape how Puerto Ricans envision their culture, creating a complex interplay between external and internal influences.

As this study will demonstrate, the colonial discourse identified in the U.S. and Puerto Rico newspapers about Puerto Ricans is as ambivalent. While the newspapers’ coverage analyzed demonstrates that Puerto Ricans were described as “lazy” and “corrupt,” other players interviewed in the media invoked U.S. citizenship as a strategy to advocate for better federal relief and ultimately annexation of Puerto Rico to the U.S. This research will explore the contradictory narratives of exclusion and inclusion originating from the U.S. metropolis and how they affect the way Puerto Ricans are viewed and treated in the U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial system.

The colonial subjects negotiated and contested these two contradictory narratives in distinct ways during the period analyzed. Those seeking annexation also relied on American citizenship to advocate for statehood as the referendum approached. In an attempt to move beyond the stereotypical depictions, Puerto Ricans advocating for statehood felt summoned by the discourse that positioned them as part of the imagined American community. This term “imagined community” draws from the idea that nations are not by biological or natural factors but rather culturally and socially constructed (Anderson, 1983). Meanwhile, Puerto Ricans who seek decolonization and independence created new ways of resistance rooted in intersectional community and belonging. These responses demonstrate the constructed hybrid identity, shaped by both exclusion and inclusion within the colonial relationship, and how it manifests in social and political action.

This thesis explores the concept of “mimicry” in the context of Puerto Rico as a negotiation, rather than a direct challenge to the colonial regime. According to Bhabha, mimicry refers to the ways in which colonized peoples imitate or mimic the cultural practices, language, and behavior of the colonizers. Through this process, Bhabha argues that colonial subjects can disrupt colonial authority by challenging the binary oppositions between the colonized and colonizer imposed by stereotypical discourse. When someone mimics the dominant culture, they do not simply replicate it, but rather create a distorted or exaggerated version of it. This thesis analyzes the term mimicry in the context of the assimilation discourse, which positions Puerto Ricans in the American imagination.

Through this analysis, I challenge the notion that mimicry is a form of contestation to the dominant narrative. Kris Sealey's (2018) article *Resisting the Logic of Ambivalence: Bad Faith as Subversive, Anticolonial Practice* criticizes Bhabha's proposal of mimicry as a transgressive performance of ambivalence. Her reading on Bad Faith as a form of anticolonial practice propelled the analysis of the resistance readings in the newspapers analyzed. Sealey

(2018) identified that looking at mimicry as a form of liberation fails to recognize the loss of belonging made plausible through this hybridization. This research provides other forms of anticolonial practice that can occur and emanate from hybridization that does not lead to submission under the status quo. I analyze the efforts of other actors in Puerto Rico that celebrate and create new forms of self-identification that also deviate from traditional notions of national identity. This thesis focuses on how the discourses are shared in U.S. and Puerto Rico newspapers because the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing attitudes toward the colonized peoples.

Although the role of news media outlets in shaping public discourse and perpetuating colonial power has long been overlooked (Shome, 2016), recent research suggests that in many sections of society, they have become the primary source of information, replacing older institutions, such as the Church and trade unions (Talbot, 2007). By analyzing the colonial discourse shared in the newspapers, this thesis aims to gain insight into how colonial powers use language and imagery to maintain domination. News media outlets are a crucial tool in shaping public discourse and are often used by colonial powers to propagate their ideologies and maintain power. However, news outlets can also be used to challenge colonial power by providing alternative viewpoints and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Hence, this thesis turns into a newspaper analysis to understand the society that produces it.

Analyzing the ways that colonial discourse and new forms of self-identification are presented in the public discourse, this thesis seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. To further elaborate on the specific Puerto Rican case, this thesis begins by presenting the colonial history of the country. Then, it will shed light on some of the theoretical discussions surrounding postcolonial and anticolonial frameworks. Following this, it will present the

major theoretical concerns about discourse, representation, and identity. To bring this discussion into the communication studies arena, it incorporates the relationship between media and discourse. With these theoretical considerations, I will read against the grain the coverage in the newspapers with major circulation in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. This study will analyze the examples of colonial discourse in the news, display its ambivalence, and engage with its resistance readings.

Literature review

Colonial history

Puerto Rico's economic and political changes through history have been mainly by or in response to foreign interventions since the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century. Colonialism became part of Caribbean history when Christopher Columbus landed in the Bahamas in 1492, as part of the colonization of the New World. One year later, the Spaniards arrived in Puerto Rico, subdued the majority of the native population for years, and were able to control most of the island by 1508 (Yale, 1970). After three centuries of colonial rule, most of the Caribbean islands were able to see their independence, however, that was not the case for Puerto Rico. Spain proclaimed the autonomy of Puerto Rico on November 25, 1897, in the "Carta Autonoma" (a form of constitutional autonomy), but the news did not reach the island until January 1898 (Library of Congress, 1898). After a voting process months later, Puerto Rico only had a self-government for a month (Brás, 1998). In July 1898, near the end of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. launched a military invasion of Puerto Rico, naming General John R. Brooke military governor months after (History, 2010). That same year, the Treaty of Paris was signed, officially ending the Spanish-American War and transferring the colony to the U.S. (History, 2010). Since then, every major political change in the Island, including granting Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, has been influenced or decided by U.S. policy.

In 1900, the U.S. “established the colonial regime” with the Foraker Act signed into law to establish a civilian government (Puerto Rico, n.d.). Years later, in 1917, citizenship was imposed on Puerto Ricans as a means of undermining growing movements of independence; it was not instituted to pave the way for Puerto Rico’s statehood or grant Puerto Ricans equal status as Americans (Fernandez 1996, pg. 33). The Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans a statutory right and created a bill of rights for the territory, separated its government into executive, legislative and judicial branches, and declared Puerto Rico’s official language to be English (History, 2009).

The “Commonwealth” status that Puerto Rico currently holds began years later in 1952. This status was created in response to the international push to end colonialism around the world and the Puerto Ricans’ demand for self-determination. While emphasizing that there was mutual consent, the Resolution declared: “Thus we attain the goal of complete self-government, the last vestiges of colonialism having disappeared in the principle of Compact, and we enter into an era of new developments in democratic civilization” (United States, 1966, p. 103). Under international law, the commonwealth status is structured by free association; it is supposed to be a consensual form of national affiliation. But in the case of Puerto Rico, the country is still subject to U.S. plenary power. The resolution stated that the colonial relationship would end, but the “Commonwealth” status is still under the jurisdiction of the Congress of the United States. During the 1950s, the new government under the Commonwealth began suppressing, criminalizing, and censoring the Nationalist movements, taking up the role of colonial police previously held by the U.S. government. The governor at the time, Luis Muñoz Marín, diverted the anticolonial sentiments that emerged by celebrating Puerto Rican culture while still aligning the island with the political and economic interests of the U.S. Thus, the U.S. was able to reconfigure the colonial status of Puerto Rico and persuade the international community about the end of colonialism in the island. But Puerto

Ricans were granted a “self-government” that is still under the political, economic, and social dominance of the U.S.

The colonial regime created by Congress was validated by the Insular Cases of 1901. This series of Supreme Court decisions held, at the height of what has been called the “imperialist” period in U.S. history (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021), that the former Spanish colonies annexed by the U.S “belong[ed] to, but [were] not a part of, the United States.” The Insular Cases held that the “entire” Constitution applies within the United States, which includes the states, the District of Columbia, and the so-called “incorporated” territories, while only its “fundamental” limitations apply to “unincorporated” territories, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021). With the ruling, the Court created a distinction between “incorporated” territories, which were on the path to statehood, and “unincorporated” territories, which could be kept and governed indefinitely.

A standard account argues for a repurpose of the Insular Cases stating that since they relegated the territories to a nearly extraconstitutional zone, then the constitution does not stand in the way of the territorial cultural practices (Harvard, 2017; Russell, 2017). However, Ponsa-Kraus (2021) argues against the repurposing project stating that the Insular Cases did not create a nearly extraconstitutional zone and gave rise to nothing less than a crisis of political legitimacy in the unincorporated territories. "The insular cases constitutionalized permanent colonialism by introducing the unincorporated territory into American constitutional law" (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021). A decision that scholars “unanimously” agree was motivated by racism (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021). The most influential decision of the Insular Cases, *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901) describes the residents of Puerto Rico as "savages" or of a foreign race not immersed "in the principles of common law." A case decided by the same group of U.S. Supreme Court justices five years earlier established the “separate but equal” doctrine of

racial segregation, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Ponsa-Kraus (2021) argues that the concept of an unincorporated territory allowed for an indefinite colonial rule over majority-nonwhite populations at the margins of the American empire and due to the Insular Cases' role in constitutionalizing colonialism, repurposing them would only prolong the crisis. The solution lies in overruling them and erasing the doctrine of territorial incorporation from American constitutional law (Ponsa-Kraus, 2021; Adriel Cepeda Derieux & Rafael Cox Alomar, 2022; Derieux & Weare; 2020, Alan Mygatt-Tauber, 2021). Until then, Puerto Rico and the other “unincorporated” territories will remain subject to U.S. sovereignty without representation.

One of the latest demonstrations of the U.S.-PR colonial relationship is the imposed Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) that oversees Puerto Rico’s finances. The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA (S.2328, 2016) approved by the Congress of the United States established an oversight board in the country for restructuring debt and accelerating the procedures for approving critical infrastructures projects. Since then, the imposed fiscal board has been overseeing debt renegotiations, a process that has resulted in tough austerity measures as Puerto Rico tried jump-starting its economic growth. The board began a debt restructuring in exchange for the loss of political control over government spending, taxation, and indebtedness (Lamba-Nieves, Marxuach & Torres, 2021). It has also generated nearly \$1 billion in earnings for the U.S. attorneys involved (Acevedo & Gutierrez, 2021). Amid this reality, Subervi-Vélez et al., (2021) reminds us that:

Any undertones to that under the guise of being an “Estado Libre Asociado” (or Free-Associated State) fell flat on their face after President Obama signed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA, in June 2016.

(p.4)

The enactment of PROMESA was just as colonial as the legislation itself (Cabán, 2017). The Puerto Rican government and representatives from various political groups of the Island were not formally included in the creation of the law. Even after this decision, the U.S.-Puerto Rico socio-political relationship was not discussed in the media internationally as it was after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017. Looking at contemporary discussions of colonial discourse like the one after the catastrophe, this study adds to the understanding of historical processes identified in media that have been often overlooked by postcolonial studies.

Postcolonial and anticolonial discursive framework

Anticolonial activism and writing from colonial territories lead the way for postcolonial thinking. Anticolonialism is both understood as a historical moment and a scholarly analysis. As a historical moment, it is the struggle against imperial rule in colonized countries, mostly during the first half of the twentieth century. As a philosophical movement and critical analysis, anticolonialism is the under-acknowledged predecessor to postcolonial theory (Elam, 2017). Since its origins, anticolonialism has been centering on Blacks and their descendants' struggles for liberation. It was a diasporic undertaking that forged a tricontinental link of struggles of people of African descent across America, the Caribbean, and Africa, or what Paul Gilroy has labeled the 'Black Atlantic' (Nkomo, 2011). Although the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory helps in the understanding of nineteenth-century colonial legacies, the use of "post" when describing contemporary reality has been problematized by many anticolonial scholars. Some anticolonial scholars have claimed that postcolonialism signifies an unrealistic rupture from the colonial past and a plunge into a different state of being, a post-colonial world (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). Anticolonial scholars argue that "the majority of colonized and oppressed people of Africa, Asia, and America realize that there is nothing 'post' about colonialism" (Nkomo, 2001, p.306). The questioning by anticolonial scholars of postcolonial theory, however, is not to deny its

theoretical validity, but to “search for ways to critically analyze the contemporary reality of colonized subjects” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p.306). This thesis uses “postcolonial” theory as a general process with shared features across the world, whilst it recognizes the debates surrounding the principle.

Postcolonial scholars respond to issues surrounding the enforcement of colonial power during the nineteenth century and the ongoing impact of the colonial regime. In its earlier phase, postcolonialism began to draw attention to the symbolic forms of colonialism and an integral part of the justification of the colonial occupation (Cabán, 2002; Said, 1978; Bhabha, 2012; Césaire, 2000). In the case of the Western colonizer Said (1978) states that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage to produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.

Similarly, to Said’s examination of Orientalism as a discourse, Cabán (2002) highlights that colonial discourse is a central component of the colonial regime in Puerto Rico. During the U.S. invasion, colonial managers such as General George Davis and Governor Beekman Winthrop spread the idea that Puerto Ricans were unprepared to govern themselves to justify restrictive colonial rule and oversight of the island's political behavior (Cabán, 2002; Go, 2000; Clark, 1973; U.S. Department of War, 1900) Americanization was portrayed as a noble altruistic endeavor to impart the benefits and qualities of the U.S. to the “unfortunate primitive peoples” (Cabán, 2002, pg. 118). However, in reality, it was driven by commercial and military strategies which were essential to the U.S. goals for hemispheric hegemony and national security (Cabán, 2002):

U.S. colonial officials believed that through a campaign of Americanization, these strange and exotic peoples would be converted into semiliterate, loyal subjects who

would apprehend the legitimacy of U.S. sovereignty and accept the new political and economic order that would be imposed on their societies (pg. 118).

Despite being incorporated into colonial administration and partly assimilated into the norms and values of U.S. society, Puerto Ricans continued to be deprived of both political autonomy and participation in the U.S. political system. Puerto Ricans face limits and constraints in their American citizenship due to the process of colonization, imperialism, and racialization (Alamo-Pastrana 2016; Barreto & Lozano 2017)

The distinct treatment is justified and legitimized by colonial discourse that positions colonized subjects as inferior, and in need of administration. Said (1978) states that colonial discourse creates and amplifies distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized to justify colonialism. In *Orientalism* (1978) he asserts that the false images created of the Orient or the East by the Western are part of the colonial project. “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”) (p.43). This distinction of us/them presented by Said became one of the main discussions in postcolonial debates. Frantz Fanon also discusses this binary opposition thinking about the dominant group (“Us,” the Self) and the dominated group (“Them,” the Other) in the colonial relationship. Through colonial discourse, the Self constructs the Other and assigns negative values to their real or imagined characteristics in order to claim superiority.

One of the key features of this discourse is particularly relevant for the analysis of media representations of colonized peoples: the prevailing belief in racial hierarchies and the persistence of racist ideologies across time and contexts. In the history of colonial relations, racial stratification has served to naturalize superior or inferior positions of power and to justify imperialist policies. Racial hierarchies and racism are key features of the concept of “otherness” in colonial discourse. Because of the connection of colonialism with the

processes of slavery, race became one of the key differentiations to determine who constitutes the “Other.” Since its origins, colonial discourse emphasized that the non-white races were “inferior, primitive, vulnerable, child-like, treacherous, and incapable of governing themselves” (Nayar, 2015, p. 129). Colonial discourse binds “a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization” (Bhabha, 2012, p. 96). The objective of colonial discourse “is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin” (Bhabha, 2012, pg. 101). It is this racial identification dividing the zone between being and the zone of non-being, between the Self and the Other (Fanon, 1967). The hierarchical view of race/culture is responsible for the formation of stereotypes about the “natives” in the colonies and is further used to justify colonization. Anibal Quijano (2000) with the concept of “coloniality of power” discusses how the structures of power, control, and hegemony, which emerged in the conquest, were used and continue to impact the racial distribution of labor. This racialization process continues to have direct implications for the development and continuity of the U.S. current political systems.

Gender, like race, can be understood as a construct of the colonial object. The idea of the “coloniality of gender” by Argentine philosopher Lugones (2016) fills gaps in Quijano’s work, illuminating broader aspects of gender and intersectionality as they relate to capitalist expansion. “Coloniality of gender” looks at how the dominant gender system that we have today was imposed upon the world through the process of European colonization (Lugones, 2016). The gender binaries, Said (1978) explains, played a part in Orientalism which “encouraged a peculiarly (not to say invidiously) male conception of the world” (pg. 207). The women's experience has a “lamentably alien ” common feature with those of the delinquent, the insane, and the poor (Said, 1978, pg. 207). For women of color, the oppression is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) due to the patriarchal and racist ideologies that

originated from colonization. Postcolonial feminists have highlighted that the patriarchal views of the state during colonization are critical in a gendered understanding of political violence, which directly impacts women of color. In Puerto Rico, for example, the reproduction of the “overpopulation” discourse during the Mass Migration of the ’50s, materialized as a justification of the U.S. institutionalization initiatives such as experimenting with birth control pills on Puerto Rican women (Román, 2022). The U.S. also promoted permanent sterilization that pushed women to have a hysterectomy and tubal ligation (Arce, 2021). By 1965, thirty-four percent of Puerto Rican women had been sterilized, the highest incidence of sterilization in the world (Briggs, 1998). Lugones's (2016) concept of the “coloniality of gender” allows us to understand how this type of gendered violence plays a formative role in shaping colonial societies.

Postcolonial theory focuses on the structures of gender and race, which originated through colonialism, to understand their role in the capitalist society and in the struggle for decolonization. The postcolonial theory, in general, has been criticized because it privileges the power of culture and discourse over an analysis of the way colonialism enabled socioeconomic and political institutions and other forms of social transformations (Parry, 2007). Other scholars, however, argue that these arguments “entail a misrepresentation of postcolonial theory’s more complex relation with totality thinking” (Colpani, 2022). In his work, Fanon expands on Marxist class categorizations, highlighting that they cannot be separated from race and racism as integral parts of colonial society (Fairchild, 1994, pg. 193). Much like Fanon, Quijano (2000) identifies in the “coloniality of power” that race is the organizing principle of capitalist formation. The conquest and construction of America marked the inception of modernity, Quijano states, and with it, a new form of control and appropriation of labor emerged – slavery, serfdom, wage labor, and so on- into a singular structure of capitalism (Quijano, 2000). From the colonization period onwards “a new

technology of domination/exploitation, in this case, race/labor, was articulated in such a way that the two elements appeared naturally associated” (Quijano, pg. 537). Quijano, and other postcolonial scholars, conclude that the relationship between race and capitalism is not a necessity but a historical articulation (Colpani, 2022) that served its purpose through the nineteenth-century expansion and continues in the contemporary capitalist society.

Thinking about the struggles of liberation, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon is aware that the fight for independence is a class struggle, not only a national issue. In the third essay “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” Fanon presents the conflict between the middle class and the masses. For him, it is the rural peasantry who would have an active role in the anticolonial struggles, not the urban proletariat (Fanon, 2001). He argues:

In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country (pg.47).

His analysis derives from the thought that the rural peasantry has nothing to lose, while the urban proletariat has an interest in negotiating with the colonizer (Fanon, 2001). The urban working class, he says, is part of the most “necessary and irreplaceable if the colonial machine is to run smoothly,” leading to a “privileged position” in the colonial system (pg.86). Fanon (2001) notes that the colonized power relies on the urban proletariat of the colony to do the administrative tasks, maintain public order and be a connection between the colonial regime and the local population. Fanon suggests that the colonized middle class has a direct involvement in the dependent relationship by imitating the goals, objectives, and methodologies of the traditional bourgeois which makes them inadequately prepared to administer the country after independence (Fairchild, 1992). An important factor in organizing the anticolonial resistance, in order to overcome internal conflicts between the

natives, is the unification of the people under a revolutionary national identity. Fanon recognized that whilst that happens, there is a split identity perpetuated by a fractured colonial discourse. This analysis of colonial discourse's impact on identity formation is one of the central discussions by postcolonial scholars.

Discourse, representation, and identity

Both anticolonial and postcolonial scholars illuminate on how and why the center produces selected discourses and is attentive to the danger that these become the narrative (Bhabra, 2014). “Discourse,” according to Foucault (1977), is a set of socially constructed rules and conventions that dictate how a subject is defined and discussed, including when, where and by whom. From this viewpoint, the patterns between statements, concepts or themes can be categorized as discourse. However, discourses are not unified structures but rather are fragmented and can be combined in diverse ways depending on the historical context that serve to uphold power.

Misrepresentation and stereotypes are characteristics of colonial discourses documented by scholars. The differentiation in colonial discourse construes the colonized as a population of degenerates on the basis of racial origin producing a fixed identity in which the colonized “is the ‘Other’ yet entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, 2012, p.101). According to Fanon (1966), cultural stereotypes are part of everyday colonial societies where white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of both ideological and physical identification. In *The Spectacle of The Other*, Hall (1997) suggests that the stereotype tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power and is the way the oppressor explains the racial “Other” without engaging them in the fullness of contradictory experience and diversity. He is particularly conscious of the repercussions of stereotypes as they serve to maintain order. Césaire discusses these implications of this in his work *Discourse of Colonialism* (2000), stating that “the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a

collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided by them” (Césaire, 2000, p. 32). These narratives in colonial discourse, hence, function as one of the tools that legitimize colonial power.

Since its origins, Said (1978) argues, colonial discourse operates as preparation for military campaigns, or as a justification for colonial occupation and influence on colonial policy. In the case of the Western colonialists, Said (1978) states that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage to produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post Enlightenment period. The analysis of colonial discourse originally focused on the work through the Western lens of the Orient (Asia, India, Middle East and North Africa). These ideas “were set up and reinforced in the writings of western travelers, commercial enterprises, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators since Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798” (Said, 1978, pg. 50). Said emphasizes that the consequences of the dehumanization of the “Other” in colonial discourse continues to have reverberations even after direct occupation.

Today, many scholars use the term Western gaze originated by Said (1978) when describing the Western representations and impositions of the non-Western. The notion of the Western gaze, first introduced by Said (1978), has become a useful framework for analyzing how Puerto Ricans are depicted in American popular culture. During the Mass Migration of the ‘50s, Sandoval (2008) notes the rising population was portrayed as mostly composed of clannish men, knife carriers, and oversexed liars not fit to live in cities. This simplistic and adulterated image made its way into books, plays, and, consequently, films creating the stereotype (Menéndez, 1993, p.293). Films such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1956), *The Young Savages* (1961), and *West Side Story* (1957/1961) portrayed Puerto

Ricans as juvenile delinquents. Other films between 1974 and 1980 “became more brutal than ever before” (Menéndez, 1993, p.295). Films like *Fort Apache: The Bronx* (1980) with all of the dealers of the movie being Puerto Ricans responsible for the deaths of white youngsters. The movie was publicized on the assumption that America had to be cleansed from all “undesirables” (Menéndez, 1993, pg. 295), while putting the blame on the policies and programs of the 1960s that perpetuated the Mass Migration. “The time was ripe for a change in the political structure of the nation and the election of Ronald Reagan only confirmed the advent of a conservative policy” (Menéndez, 1993, pg. 295). Colonial discourse continues to have direct influence in the colonial power and its policies in the contemporary world.

Academics conclude that these colonialist’s ideas and principles via discourses are also able to influence the colonized mindset, ideas about their own cultures, and understanding of power-relation. Hall (1990) states that identity is as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, influenced by both social and historical forces. In *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, he argues that cultural identities are created within the “plays” of history and power and “always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990, p. 222). The significance of cultural productions lies in the symbolic power of being able to represent someone within a certain regime of representation, thus, these discursive representations can be a form of symbolic violence (Hall, 1997). Representation has the power to make the colonized accept and recognize themselves as the “Other” and, consequently, impose it as their “knowledge” (Fanon, 1967). The power/knowledge that fixes the identities of the two opposed subjects feeds on discourses produced and reproduced in cultural products (Fanon, 1967). Domination, Fanon (1967) argues, is accomplished by the physiological deprivations of the colonized self-present in colonial discourse. As Bhabha (2012) asserts, it is important to understand “the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (p.95).

Therefore, representation cannot be seen as superficial because “they [the dominant regimes of representation] had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as ‘Other’” (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

In the colonial relationship, with promises of equal recognition, the colonized is left with the identities the colonizer makes available for him to accept. Analyzing the politics of recognition, Fanon (1967) states that the struggle for recognition can perpetuate the oppression of the colonized when that desire leads to a recognition within the discourse of the colonizer. Judith Butler also complicates the politics of recognition, stating that at the moment when a choice is impossible “the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence” (Butler, 1997 p.20). However, Fanon (1967) discusses that the colonized subject will be free only when he is recognized as who one *truly is*. Fanon sees the pushes and pulls of the colonial subject who debates between compliance and resistance of the forms of identification available for them to accept.

Identity, hence, is always seen as a negotiation and contestation in relationship to otherness. “Colonial discourse produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘Other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, 2012, pg. 41). With the concept of ambivalence postcolonial theorists have intended to break down the binary distinctions present in previous conversations about colonialism and imperialism that only assume a movement in one direction- a movement from the colonizer to the colonized (Bhabha, 2012). Since the colonial power is characterized by ambivalence, the relationship itself involves a constant negotiation and struggle between colonizer and colonized. Bhabha cites Frantz Fanon *Black skin, White Masks*, who claims that being in two places at once makes it impossible to accept the colonizer’s invitation to identity: “you’re a doctor, a writer, a student, you’re different, you’re one of us” (Fanon, 1967, p.14). The cultural interactions in the colonial encounter create a hybridization that opens space for an ambivalent self-

identification in the in-between (Bhabha, 2012). The ‘you’re different, you’re one of us’ relationship can be seen in the Puerto Rican case, who are identified by the U.S. law as “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense” (Thompson, 1989, p. 102). Regardless of the intentions of assimilation, the colonized subject is never divorced from the racialization process in everyday experiences. In the case of Puerto Ricans, they are in between the blurry opposition of “Latin domestic and Racial other” (Sandoval, 2008, p.82). The ambivalent self-identification, Bhabha (2012) argues transforms the colonized as well as the colonizer's understanding of itself. In the long run, Bhabha (2012) states that ambivalence is a productive force that disrupts and destabilizes colonial power structure because it shows the ruptures in the colonial relation. The concepts of hybridity and ambivalence are among the most recurrent in recent postcolonial debates, complicating the hierarchical dynamic that was prioritized in Said (1978) and other scholars' work.

Such ambivalence produces a subject, which is a mimicry, a "partial presence" that is both similar to and different from the original. To be free from colonialism can be a cathartic experience for the colonial subject (Fanon, 1963). But “there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place” (Fanon, 1963, p.30).

Differently from Fanon, Bhabha sees this partial presence as a form of resistance that challenges the binary oppositions and hierarchies of the colonial discourse, creating a space of hybridity in which new cultural forms and identities can emerge. This thesis aims to analyze and problematize the ambivalence in colonial discourse and mimicry that emerges from it as it is seen in the news media.

Media and colonial discourse

Media “discourse” is important both for what it reveals about society and for what it contributes to the character of society (Bell, 1995). Research suggests that media influences through the individual or direct effect, and the social or indirect effect (Arias, 2019). On an

individual level, the media can persuade individuals to accept new norms (Arias, 2019), and the way the media represents individuals can impact their identity formation (Stuart Hall, 1990). Socially, the media disseminates information, creates common knowledge, and promotes consensus in which people are more likely to believe what is shared if other people in society accept it (Arias, 2019). In the process of creating meaning, journalism and other forms of mass media play a crucial role in controlling, choosing, and organizing the way discourse about the colonized populations is produced (Rodríguez, 1998). According to this viewpoint, news reporting is a type of communication that involves taking structured ways of speaking and using them to talk about specific events in a way that is appealing to a wide audience (Spurr, 1993). In this sense, even journalistic practices that help construct articles in a “structured way of speaking,” such as the doctrine of objectivity, can perpetuate colonial discourse by adhering to the status quo.

The objectivity ethic in U.S. daily newspapers emerged in American journalism during the late century due to a group of factors related to group solidarity and control over subordinates (Schudson, 2001). During that same period, Bhabha (2012) notes, America's “backyard” policy in the Caribbean and Latin America and the British power had an impact on the media landscape. He argues that this economic and political domination “has a profound hegemonic influence on the information orders of the Western world, its popular media and its specialized institutions and academics” (Bhabha, 2012, pg. 30). Although the media influences and has been influenced by such economic, social and individual factors, the notion of “objectivity” has failed to recognize journalists' role in society as cultural actors (Robinson & Bartzen Culver, 2019; Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). The danger in relying on these standards of journalism, they argue, is that in many instances it is used to maintain the status quo. Although journalists are taught to “view from nowhere,” we are always positioned

and, therefore, all decision making is informed by the way we think about race, social class, gender roles, among other social relationships.

In Puerto Rico, for example, the U.S., colonial influences were key elements in the local media construction and disclosure of blackness (Rivero, 2002, pg. 18). Afro-Puerto Rican Maritza Quiñones-Rivera states in her thesis, “I recall growing up in the island feeling invisible, not part of the dialogue, nor considered a customer, or a target audience member” (Quiñones-Rivera 2006, pg.64). The Black Puerto Ricans were not portrayed in the media as part of the Puerto Rican population. Moreover, she explains that for her to be able to feel Puerto Rican enough meant erasing her Africaness (Quiñones-Rivera, 2006, pg.1). Still today, Black Puerto Ricans are usually seen as a part of the folklore of the population and as remnants of the past era (Godreau, 2002). The inclusion of these communities as only part of a racial mixture and in the margins of society has managed to translate into exclusion of communities of color from the media platforms. In the 21st century the agents of the media in Puerto Rico “have been pluralized in gender, but not in race” (Lugo-Ortiz, n.d., p. 11). The erasure of Afro-Puerto Ricans in the media reflects the racism in the Puerto Rican society that was established through the processes of slavery and colonization.

In spite of its significance, however, postcolonial and anticolonial scholars have not paid enough attention to the reproduction of colonial discourse in popular media (Huggan, 2013; Shome, 2016). Another discussion from Shome (2016) is that in an age of mass publications, fewer people have access to literature than they do television, tablets, street visuals, the internet, mobile technologies, advertising, music videos, and so on. The literacy skills needed to analyze extended written literature texts also presents, for the colonial subject, a further constraint when considering the subjective postcolonial dilemma. This has been the case by which performance art, specifically street art more than elevated forms of art, has been an area of major expression for the colonized (Shome, 2016). Adding to this,

traditional literature does not have the scale of mass-circulation that other cultural products such as mass media have.

In recent years, some scholars have begun to pay attention to the relationship between colonialism and the media. Among the latest contributions is the work of Federico Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021), who analyze Puerto Rico's news media landscape. In their book *The News Media in Puerto Rico: Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crisis*, the authors analyze the island's news media system as one that operates in response to Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States. They argue that much of the mainstream media's news coverage complies with and reproduces colonial discourses, such as claims that Puerto Ricans are unable to govern themselves (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). News media outlets, including *El Nuevo Día*, often present narratives that appear to accept the limited autonomy of the island without questioning the fundamentals of such arrangements (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). The media environment in Puerto Rico complies with or accepts the colonial condition of the island, thereby contributing to its continuity (Subervi-Vélez et al. 2021). The authors propose that similarly to Edward Said's claim that imperialism and the novel fortified each to the point that one cannot be understood without the other, "it is impossible to read the news media in Puerto Rico without acknowledging they are part of a broader colonial setting developed within the past century" (pg. 146). Due to its intrinsic relationship, it is imperative to analyze the mediated colonial discourse to understand its contribution to the continuation of colonialism. Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021) assert that in the dominant discourses of newspapers Puerto Ricans are part of the subaltern. When talking about the subaltern, the authors (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021, pg. 145) refer to the concept coined by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, 2006 [1950]) that identified the social groups excluded and displaced from the socio-economic institutions of society to deny their political voices.

In Puerto Rican newspapers, “this means not only that it starts from the perspective of a victim without power, but also that it has limited ability to be heard” (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021, pg. 145). An example is that the mainstream media in the island tends to focus on the tensions and confrontations between the elite, rather than the mobilizations in the island (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). Overall, the authors suggest that the subaltern’s lack of representation and voice in Puerto Rican media serves to perpetuate their exclusion from mainstream society as a colonial subject.

Methodology

Research Questions

This thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How is colonial discourse present in articles published by the U.S. newspaper (USA Today) and Puerto Rico newspaper (El Nuevo Día) in the coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017 up to the subsequent local elections of 2020?
2. How do the highest circulating newspapers in the U.S. and Puerto Rico reflect an ambivalent colonial discourse?
3. How are these discourses used to reinforce or challenge power relations?

This study uses textual analysis as the methodological approach to analyze mediated discourse. Textual analysis is generally a type of qualitative analysis that “beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (Fürsich, 2009). Textual analysis allows us to interpret the meanings of culture through texts. When using textual analysis scholars may choose from a variety of research tools that fall under the umbrella of this method including thematic analysis, critical discourse analysis, ideological analysis or more specific types such as genre analysis or cultural analysis (Fürsich, 2009).

This thesis employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a tool to analyze the intersections between power, media and knowledge construction (Van Dijk, 1993). The analysis is based on Teun van Dijk and Norman Fairclough's approaches to CDA as their methods present more detailed and rule-bound investigative strategies than other types of textual analysis (Fürsich, 2009). The methodological strategies used in CDA often tend to be diverse with scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk, and James Paul Gee proposing different methodological strategies for conducting CDAs (Johnson & McLean, 2020). However, Fairclough's three interrelated processes of analysis, micro-, meso-, and macroscale social phenomena, is the most prominent in the field. "Multiple CDA approaches explicitly or implicitly attempt to make links between micro-, meso-, and macroscale social phenomena, mapping discourse analyses across these scales correspondingly" (Johnson & McLean, 2020, para. 9). Fairclough mapped the analysis as discursive events (micro), which is an analysis of (spoken or written) language texts; discourse practice (macro), which is the analysis of the processes of text production, distribution and consumption; and social structures (macroscale social phenomena), which analyzes the discursive events as examples of sociocultural practice (Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013, p. 2). This analysis will use this three-dimensional framework to study discourse to analyze the different levels of discursive practices.

The linguistic practices and signs of colonial discourse analyzed in this thesis are grounded in Shahzad-ul-Hassan Farooqui's (2018) conceptualization of colonial discourse through the lens of the Fairclough model of CDA. In *Signs of Colonial Discourse and their Psycho-Semiotic Significance*, Farooqui (2018) outlines the level of analysis of Fairclough as consisting of three steps: description, interpretation, and explanation. He describes them as follow:

1. Description: word level. (Where exact words as linguistic items relate to a particular discourse and their semantic and connotative meanings are exposed)
2. Interpretation: discursive level. (Where meanings interplay with intertextual relations of a text and it is embedded in the discourse it belongs to.)
3. Explanation: conventional or social level. (Where particular meaning making practices become conventional narrative patterns of a society within which that discourse generates.)

In this sense, textual analysis with CDA starts by examining the words utilized in a text and then extends to incorporate the relationship between meanings, references, and other linguistic practices that relate to the same discourse from various aspects of signification (Farooqi, 2018). With this lens, Farooqi (2018) conceptualizes that colonial discourse are linguistic practices that are influenced by psychological conditioning and socially upheld conventions. Hence, he argues, “colonialism is not only a historical fact but also a linguistically and semiotically crafted phenomenon” (Farooqi, 2018, pg. 177).

Some examples of the conventionalized linguistic practices as signs of colonial discourse discussed by Farooqi (2018) are the use of: binaries, pronouns and adjectives, synonyms/hyponyms, type/token, intertextuality, universalism and high moral ground of an action. Binaries are linguistic practices which reflect the colonizers’ practice of segmenting the world into Self and Other (Farooqi, 2018, Bhabha, 2012). The use of pronouns aids in the creation of such binary opposition, as a friction between “We” vs “you, them, those” (Farooqi, 2018). Adjectives also have an important function in colonial discourse because certain qualities are adjudicated to the colonizer in contrast to those used to describe the colonized (Farooqi, 2018). Similarly, he argues that in colonial discourse the possessiveness “ours” and “theirs” is a linguistic practice used to give a higher value to the colonizer’s belongings, while presenting the colonized possessions as inferior. Intertextuality is a way for

discourse analysis to highlight the historical context of the narratives presented in the text. These linguistic practices described by Farooqui will be taken into consideration during the analysis of this thesis.

The use of CDA is a common methodological approach for cultural and critical scholars and is often merged with other methodologies to ensure its effectiveness. A contemporary study that has used the CDA to analyze newspapers coverage is *Critical discourse analysis in the study of representation, identity politics and power relations: a multi-method approach* by Ana Caballero Mengibar. In this study, Caballero Mengibar (2014) sheds light on the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method for revealing power relations in the examination of identity politics. The author uses CDA to examine whether certain Spanish newspapers contained binary discourse that portrayed Spaniards as included and immigrants from the Global South as excluded. It also analyzed how the newspapers depicted the Self and the Other in such discourses. However, on her investigation, Caballero Mengibar (2014) recognizes that CDA has limitations such as “the lack of guidelines to follow to uncover language use, the high levels of subjective interpretation required for contextualizing language-use, and the difficulties of operationalizing large sets of data from texts, just to name a few” (pg. 44). To overcome the broadness of CDA, she employs a multi-method approach with interviews and the use of content analysis to operationalize the large set of data before using CDA. Caballero Mengibar’s (2014) research highlighted the importance of categorization prior to the critical analysis of texts. This thesis will utilize keywords to narrow the articles, one of the strategies employed by Caballero Mengibar (2014), prior to the use of a CDA.

To make sense of the volume of data from the newspapers, I first identified key search terms to help narrow my focus. To ensure that every article analyzed was directly related to Puerto Rico, I included the term “Puerto Rico” in every search along with the other

keywords. Other keywords used were looked up in English and Spanish respectively: Hurricane Maria, citizenship, corruption, colonialism, decolonization, protests and elections. These keywords were chosen following a literature review about recurring themes in colonial discourse and taking into consideration the historical events during the period analyzed.

After one or more of these keywords was located in a text, I used CDA to critically analyze and uncover the meaning of the texts. The use of CDA to unveil the relationship between dominance and discourse, as discussed by Fairclough and Van Dijk, makes it an ideal approach for colonial discourse analysis. CDA departs its analysis from “prevailing social problems” and is characterized by interdisciplinarity, multimodality, and a concern with the development of context (Van Dijk, 1986, p. 4). Context is a key term in CDA as it draws upon the understanding of the institutional frameworks, looking at the structures that allow or facilitate the reproduction of the discourse. The socio-political context of PR and the U.S. then becomes a central discussion in this thesis, as CDA embraces the socio-political conditions that shape and are shaped by the discourse.

Another reason this paper uses the CDA to analyze the texts is because it encourages the researcher to practice reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity allows the researcher to interrogate the discourse making comparisons between the dominant and critical-cultural elements. The discussions presented in this thesis are always-already open to constant interrogation. “In a reflexive sense, the task of criticism is never really complete; the grand narrative never comes to closure, as we continuously question the ways in which our practices serve hegemonic interests” (Dutta & Souza, 2008, p.5). In the case of this study, the “practice” in question is the colonial discourse found in newspapers. This critical-cultural approach allows the researcher to expose the ideologies present in institutions such as the media. During this process the research may also participate in self-reflexivity. The CDA usually encourages researchers “to explicitly engage with their own interests and

positionality, and practice self-critical reflexivity throughout the research process” (Johnson & McLean, 2020, para. 1). In this case, my own preconceived notions about this topic are debated and challenged through the realization of this thesis. The CDA allows for a self-critical and confrontational analysis of the institutionalized and hegemonic ideas that have been part of my upbringings as a Puerto Rican.

Source selection

This paper chooses to examine one United States newspaper (USA Today) and one Puerto Rico newspaper (El Nuevo Día). The pre-established criterion for this study is the amount of circulation, following the criterion sampling (Yin, R. 1994) for quality assurance. The New York Times, USA Today, and The Wall Street Journal are constantly among the three highest-circulation newspapers in the U.S. (Alliance for Audited Media, n.d.). To determine the most consistently highly circulating newspaper over the period of 2017 and 2020, I analyzed the audit report of these three newspapers from September 2017 to September 2020 and found that USA Today has the highest circulation each year. To obtain these results, I summed the Sunday circulation to the average weekly circulation on each newspaper’s report (Alliance for Audited Media, n.d.). The documents were available through the Alliance for Audited Media, an independent non-profit organization recognized as a leader in publisher audits across digital, print, and out-of-home channels. In Puerto Rico, the two highest-circulation newspapers are El Nuevo Día and El Vocero (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). The statistical findings of the highest circulating newspaper each year depending on the certifying company and whether the newspaper paid for the readership study (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021, pg. 52). However, the general perception is that the highest circulation newspaper is El Nuevo Día. (SuberviVélez et al., 2021). By selecting the highest circulating newspapers in each country, this study aims to provide insights into popular attitudes, public discourse, and their impact on the U.S.- Puerto Rico relationship. The two selected

newspapers are also chosen because they can be considered middle-market newspapers as they cater to readers of important news events, while also having sections for entertainment.

This study will analyze newspapers instead of other media platforms, such as TV or radio because the slower production process of the press allows for increased editorial reflection. The news analyzed from USA Today will be retrieved from Factiva and the ones from El Nuevo Día will be retrieved from the news media outlet's online page. Both databases allow you to search the desired date range and look up news during the period and with keywords established.

The period analyzed ranges from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria on September 20, 2017, up to the local elections on November 3, 2020. The analysis of the period after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017 allows us to analyze a period where there was an incremental representation of the mediated public discussion of the U.S.-PR relationship. This analysis will allow for a reflection of the way colonial discourse in the aftermath of the hurricane was reproduced or counteracted leading to the election period. The use of this method is favorable to study the ways colonial discourse is seen in both the U.S. and Puerto Rico's highest circulation newspapers and its impact on the colonial relationship.

Results and Analysis

During the period of September 2017 to early November 2020, major events in Puerto Rico, including Hurricane Maria, earthquakes in the south of the island, the protests that led to Governor Ricardo Rosselló's resignation, and the elections, received significant coverage. A total of 57,244 articles mentioning Puerto Rico were identified in the two newspapers analyzed, with El Nuevo Día publishing the majority of the articles (55,860), and USA Today publishing 1,384. Prior to analyzing the articles, keywords were used to delimit the search in English and Spanish, respectively. The keywords used included Hurricane Maria, citizenship, corruption, colonialism, decolonization, protests, and elections. The combination of Puerto

Rico and Hurricane Maria resulted in the most articles in both newspapers, with 12,979 articles in *El Nuevo Día* and 506 in *USA Today*. The rest of the keywords combinations resulted in 10,971 articles for *El Nuevo Día* and 269 articles for *USA Today*. Notably, the keyword combination of Puerto Rico and decolonization did not result in any articles in either newspaper.

The purposive sampling approach was used in this study to select newspaper articles that were relevant to the research questions and that represented a range of perspectives and social actors. The articles presented in this thesis were based on the keywords that were chosen to delimit the search in English and Spanish respectively, and that reflected the major events and discourses surrounding Puerto Rico during the period of September 2017 to early November 2020. The results from the sample returned a mixture of different formats, ranging from regular newspaper articles, letters from the public, and editorials. This study chooses to engage in all of these sections due to their distinctive role in the news media landscape and how they can give insight into the underlying ideologies and power structures that shape discourse.

The newspaper's coverage is shaped by the decisions made by journalists and editors regarding the inclusion or exclusion of content related to a specific topic. Editorials are the most apparent expression of bias in newspapers because they reflect the official stance of the newspaper's editorial board on a particular issue. However, it is important to acknowledge that bias extends beyond editorials and permeated other forms of coverage, including articles, and even the selections of news itself. Therefore, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of colonial discourse in the newspapers, it is imperative to examine the multiple facets of their coverage.

The susceptibility of journalists to bias and their utilization of framing techniques have raised concerns surrounding the objectivity norm, which has long been regarded as a

standard in American journalism (Shudson, 2001; Boudana, 2011). Framing theory challenges the notion that complete objectivity is achievable in journalism by recognizing that how journalists frame an issue, or a community can influence how the story is perceived. Framing, as defined by Entman (1993) involves the selection of “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating a text, in such way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (pg. 52). Journalists engage in framing by making choices regarding the emphasis on specific story aspects, which angles to focus on, and which sources to include. Although there are several hypotheses of the influence of framing on the public attitudes and perception of news (d’Haenens & Lange, 2001), this practice characterizes the construction of news and reveals journalists as cultural agents determining what is being covered and how it is covered.

Criticism has also been directed at the objectivity norm due to its tendency to uphold the status quo (Boudana, 2011). In its pursuit of being "unbiased" and presenting a balanced view, objectivity often gives equal weight to established institutions and influential individuals, inadvertently amplifying the voices of those in power. This phenomenon can result in political leaders, business executives, and other members of the elite class being perceived as more credible or authoritative sources, thereby granting their perspectives more weight in the news coverage (Tuchman, 1972). Additionally, the quest for objectivity can lead journalists to the reliance of journalists on official statements and sources which can reinforce the narratives and interests of those in power, further entrenching the status quo. As a result, the inherent limitations of journalism paradigms like objectivity raise important questions about the role of journalism and journalists in challenging or perpetuating power structures.

This thesis also looks at letters to the editor and opinion pieces because they constitute a way for citizens to participate in newspaper-mediated debate (Nielsen, 2010). Hence, by analyzing them in juxtaposition with articles written by journalists it is possible to uncover the fundamental ideologies of power structures that influence discourse. Moreover, this study takes into consideration the role of journalists and editors in selecting which of these letters or opinion pieces will be published, privileging some voices while silencing others (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007; Pietikäinen, 2008). By examining the interactions between various actors and their texts, this thesis seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of how power is negotiated and contested through the medium of news discourse.

The articles presented in this thesis revealed three discursive patterns that will be critically analyzed: (1) stereotypes, (2) rhetorical inclusion, and (3) resistance. The quotations chosen to analyze these themes in the newspapers reflect various perspectives, including politicians, public figures, and members of the public. However, by looking at both newspapers' coverage, the focus of the coverage was largely on claims from politicians, officials, and other institutional voices, with relatively fewer articles dedicated to human interest stories. USA Today journalist identified in an article about disaster relief that “Puerto Rico – and the feud between Trump and island officials – remains in the eye of the political storm more than 18 months after the devastating hurricane in 2017 that killed thousands and left much of the island without power for months” (King, 2019a, para. 9). While the focus of the coverage was largely on institutional voices, it is important to recognize the value of human-interest stories. As the quotation from the USA Today article highlights, political agendas can sometimes dominate the narrative, leaving little room for other perspectives.

To begin identifying colonial discourse in news coverage it is necessary to examine how the mediated discussions perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce binary thinking (Farooqui, 2018). This thesis examines the existing categories of Americans and Puerto Ricans in the

articles and determines whether the discussions used binary language between the two identities with connotations of the American “Self” and the Puerto Rican “Other.” Identifying these two categories based on the context of the text, construe the *description* level of analysis where words can then be analyzed (Farooqui, 2018). After noting the binary relations, the next level of discourse analysis identified by Fairclough (1995) is the *interpretation* and *explanation*. This thesis presents and discusses stereotypes in the news coverage such as Puerto Ricans being “lazy” and “corrupt” that are used to justify colonial rule.

On the other hand, in cases where the term Americans were used to describe Puerto Ricans, I categorized it separately to engage in a discussion from a postcolonial perspective. The “rhetorical inclusion” theme analyzes the use of language to construct Puerto Ricans as part of the larger American identity. I engage in an analysis of how this discourse, which is also reproduced by the colonized subject, has implications for their self-identification. In this section, the ambivalence and mimicry in the colonial discourse are identified and challenged.

Finally, the third theme highlights some resistance from Puerto Ricans challenging the colonial discourse. By analyzing examples of resistance discourse, this thesis aims to show how the dominant narratives are challenged by Puerto Ricans asserting agency and voice in public discourse.

Stereotypical representations: “lazy,” “incompetent and inefficient,” and “corrupt”

The primary justification of colonization was to “civilize” and save populations from self-destruction based on the belief that the racialized colonized people are inferior and incapable of attaining advanced levels of sociopolitical organization themselves (Akpome, 2021). This section examines how contemporary narratives of “lazy” and “corrupt” Puerto Ricans echoes the same rhetoric that justified colonialism. Historically, U.S. aid for disasters

has carried overtly anti-Puerto Rican rhetoric through the policy by denying direct aid, in order to avoid supporting 'lazy' *jibaros* (Rivera 2020; Schwartz, 1992). Similarly, corruption narratives have been central in the notion that colonized subjects are deficient and in need of fund allocation surveillance. The narrative of corruption has systematically eroded the island's rights and entitlements by defining the colony as incapable of self-governing. (Villanueva, 2019). This section suggests that the U.S. narrative of portraying Puerto Rico as a "lazy" and "corrupt" place justify colonization and promote capitalist interests. Such a narrative covered by the newspapers was evidenced during the distribution of disaster relief following Hurricane Maria in 2017, subsequent earthquakes in 2020 and federal interventions with politicians in the island. The protests of 2019 moved beyond these discursive practices and called out the corruption inherent in the colonial regime. In this lens, the media coverage prioritizing of the elite perspectives is analyzed due to its neglect in fully grasping the counternarratives that arise in the archipelago.

Lazy. Days, after Hurricane María struck Puerto Rico, both USA Today and El Nuevo Día quoted former president Donald Trump's tweets criticized the then Mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulin, and "others in Puerto Rico, who are not able to get their workers to help" and that they "want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort" (Dorell & Stanglin, 2017; Delgado, 2017). Followed by the praise of the U.S. workers on the island saying that "there are 10,000 Federal workers on the island doing a fantastic job" (Dorell & Stanglin, 2017; Delgado, 2017). At a simple glance, Trump's comments provide an example of a binary distinction between Puerto Ricans and Americans. Analyzed through a postcolonial lens, these remarks can be understood as an example of colonial discourse because they depict the American "Self" in a positive light while ascribing negative attributes and stereotypes against the Puerto Rican "Other."

The negative narrative of Puerto Ricans as “lazy” was also present in a “letter to the editor” published by USA, where the author connected this “characteristic” of the island’s financial woes. Richard Doyle (2017) argued that “outsiders” cannot be blamed for Puerto Rico’s problems because most of the island’s issues were self-inflicted. With these comments, the author failed to acknowledge the social, political, economic, and cultural relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico that has contributed to the island’s economic problems. This comment was followed with an anecdote that reproduced the idea of Puerto Ricans being “lazy.” The author said: “Years ago, I often needed to quickly refuel my plane at the San Juan airport. It was like pulling teeth to get ground crews out of their chairs or off a break. Some problems are endemic” (para. 2). The expression “like pulling teeth” suggests a difficult and time-consuming process, implying that the ground crews are lazy or unresponsive. Furthermore, the author’s use of “endemic” implies that these problems are inherent to the people or culture of Puerto Rico.

As Bhabha (2012) argues, stereotypes are forms of knowledge and identification that oscillate between what is always ‘in place’ or already known, and what needs to be anxiously repeated. In the case of Puerto Rico’s financial crisis, the crisis itself is ‘in place,’ while the presupposed “laziness” needs to be continuously repeated in order to sustain its perceived value. Similarly, opinion pieces in the media often blend “evaluative propositions” (normative prescriptions) and “factual beliefs’ (social facts) (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 29) shaping the public debate. Therefore, USA Today’s publication of such a discriminatory opinion piece can contribute to the oppression of an already marginalized community. While letters to the editor and other opinion pieces allow readers to participate in the construction of reality, media editors play a critical role in setting boundaries of the debate and limiting the viewpoints that are published (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007; Nielsen, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2008).

Therefore, editors have a responsibility to carefully consider the narratives that are shared, as the perpetuation of such stereotypes can reinforce power imbalances in society.

To fully grasp the meaning and impact of these texts, one must examine the embedded historical and cultural context and intertextual references that help to shape their meaning (Farooqui, 1998). These descriptions have been documented since the Spanish-American War when U.S. newspapers covered politicians spouting similar claims against the islanders (Rodriguez, 1998). The discourse was even present in an editorial that stated that the way of doing business on the island was slow, inefficient, and lazy, known as the “mañana method” (Rodriguez, 1998). While there were no more explicit characterizations of Puerto Ricans as “lazy” in the reported speech of the analyzed period of this thesis, U.S. public officials’ criticism often relied on the same colonial discourse of incompetent and inefficient that had been previously directed at the local government, while extolling the federal response.

Incompetent and inefficient. The news coverage of William “Brock” Long, the then-administrator of FEMA, demonstrates a narrative that absolves the federal government of responsibility for the sluggish relief efforts in Puerto Rico. In an interview published by *El Nuevo Día* (Ayala-Gordían, 2018), NBC journalist Chuck Todd asked Long if there were lessons to learn from the catastrophe. In response, Long made a reference:

I always say that the management of an emergency is like a chair with four legs: one leg represents the federal government, another leg represents local government, the third leg represents private companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the fourth leg is you, the citizens. When one of those legs is missing...

When asked about the “missing leg,” Long responded that FEMA was the first agency to respond to the emergency, implying that the federal agency was not the “missing leg”

at fault for any shortcomings, downplaying FEMA's failures. Notwithstanding, months later a FEMA report stated that the agency vastly underestimated how much food and fresh water it would need, and the difficulties of getting these necessities to the island (Robles, 2018). Most newspapers, including USA Today and El Nuevo Día, covered the report. However, Long (2018) responded in a USA Today opinion piece saying that the report "was not an admission of failure" of the federal agency and once again utilized the "chair anecdote." A year later, during his resignation as FEMA administrator, "Long and other administration officials defended the agency's response by saying Puerto Rico's antiquated power grid, difficult terrain, hard-to-reach communities, and political divisions made a tough job increasingly complicated" (King, 2019b, para. 6). Overall, such responses by federal public officials reflected a colonial mentality, where the U.S. government asserted its authority and responsibility to aid the island, while simultaneously downplaying the capabilities of the Puerto Rican people and obscuring their shortcomings.

Corrupt. The portrayal of Puerto Ricans as "corrupt" was the most common discourse among U.S. officials in justifying additional federal surveillance and delayed funds allocation. This narrative was picked by the media, with both USA Today and El Nuevo Día covering the institutional comments about the island's "corrupt government." El Nuevo Día published an article titled "Acts of corruption had an impact" where they cite Alejandro de La Campa, the then-Caribbean Area Division Director for DHS/FEMA, stating that FEMA and Congress were demanding more oversight measures before disbursing funds (Ruiz-Kuilan, 2017). Similarly, USA Today said that FEMA officials attributed the delayed funds to "substandard infrastructure and government corruption" (King, 2018, para. 14). Without providing a critical perspective on the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, such portrayals mainly fueled the colonial imaginary that views Puerto Rico and its people as corrupt. None of the articles during the period referred to the colonial relationship nor

questioned the colonial regime that allows for relief funds to be withheld during an emergency in the first place. Beyond that, the corruption narrative impacted the recovery aid.

In 2019, as the island was preparing for another tropical storm, USA Today quoted a tweet from Trump where he stated that “Puerto Rico is one of the most corrupt places on Earth” (Morin, 2019, para. 2). The then Secretary of HUD, Ben Carson; HUD’s chief financial officer, Irv Dennis; and David Woll, the department’s principal deputy assistant secretary for community planning and development, echoed Trump’s allegations, stating that they knowingly missed the legally required deadline due to concerns about corruption, fiscal irregularities, and “Puerto Rico’s capacity to manage these funds” (YouTube, 2019). El Nuevo Día reported on similar claims from other U.S. officials. Mick Mulvaney, the then-Director of the Office of Management and Budget, stated that recovery aid was stopped deliberately “because we thought that that place was corrupt” (Delgado, 2019). Additionally, Noel Zamot, the ex-coordinator of the revitalization of the Fiscal Supervision Board, claimed that “the main problem that afflicts the island is not the lack of funds, but the mismanagement of the money” (Perez-Pintado, 2019, para. 5). Later, a HUD Office of Inspector General report (2021) confirmed that the U.S. government stalled more than \$20 billion in hurricane aid and imposed additional restrictions and requirements on how Puerto Rico could gain access to the funds, citing corruption and financial mismanagement concerns.

While this corruption narrative of local politicians was overcrowding the news, it was actually federal officials and foreign contractors who were accused of misusing Puerto Rico’s recovery funds. El Nuevo Día and USA Today covered these arrests (Cordero-Mercado, 2019; Jervis, 2019). On September 11, 2019, FEMA regional administrator Asha Tribble, her former deputy Jovanda Patterson, and the former president of Cobra Acquisitions, a private power grid organization granted \$200 million by FEMA, were arrested and accused of committing fraud and conspiracy by mishandling funds. These individuals were sent to

Puerto Rico to aid in the recovery process of Hurricane Maria, but instead, they sought to take advantage of the situation and benefit from the downfall of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA). However, the subsequent coverage of the delayed recovery funds continued to perpetuate the narrative that Puerto Ricans were corrupt, without a juxtaposition of the reality that it was federal officials were being prosecuted for corruption with relief funds at the time.

Following the doctrine of objectivity, the undertone of many articles revealed an acceptance of the lack of auto-determination on the Island that Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021) had identified in the Puerto Rico newspapers. Journalists failed to question the stereotypes against Puerto Ricans or to explore the continued surveillance and withholding of funds. This framing allowed U.S. officials to justify their failures in adequately responding to the disaster. By accepting and perpetuating the idea that Puerto Ricans are corrupt and incapable of self-government, the media contributed to the narrative that justified the withholding of funds and continued surveillance of the island by the United States. This highlights the importance of responsible and critical reporting, especially in situations where power imbalance and stereotypes are at play.

The idea here is not that local corruption cases do not exist, because they do, but to analyze corruption as a component of the colonial discourse. There were some isolated corruption cases in the local government that followed during the period leading to the elections. The federal government arrested top Puerto Rico government officials on federal fraud charges in 2019. The arrests of local officials made headlines in USA Today (Cummings, 2019) and El Nuevo Día (2019) breaking news sections, and the coverage reflected a framing in "episodic form" (Virella, 2022; Iyengar, 1990, 1991, 1996), which isolated the situation from the historical larger structures of colonialism and capitalism. Although an episodic frame describes events, it often foreshadows the structural conditions

that uphold corruption or makes it possible (Virella, 2022). Disregarding the colonial condition of Puerto Rico, the articles also overlooked the U.S. and local laws, transnational economic networks, and the money laundering practices that made possible incidents of bribery to occur. Nor the coverage questioned the role of federal jurisdiction on the island enabled by the colonial regime. The arrests and subsequent media coverage created a cycle seen in other news about corruption that follows a “repetitive, circuitous, and circular” (McKittrick 2021, 15), and that greatly influence our understanding and language around corruption in Puerto Rico (Atilas et al., 2022).

The coverage of local arrests followed what Villanueva (2019) describes as a repetitive cycle that defines corruption in Puerto Rico. In such a loop, the scandalous headlines dominate the news, followed by an FBI raid, arrests, and some of the accused serving time while others get away. Ultimately, such a performance helps hide the corruption behind the imperial gown.

Thus, the spectacularization of corruption and the cyclical performances of anticorruption deployed by the U.S. in PR reifies a colonial narrative of the corrupt other, while maintaining the legal, political, and economic structures that enable those corrupt schemes in the first place (Atilas. et al., 2022, pg. 11).

Virella (2022) also suggests that the media coverage of corruption cases as isolated events influences the public perception of corruption, often solely questioning the individual's moral character.

Amid the protest of the Summer of 2019, some demonstrations against Governor Ricardo Rosselló's administration broke away from the repetitive loops that have defined anti-corruption politics in the past. As noted by Atilas et al (2022) and Cabán (2020), the RickyRenuncia protest was not only against Rosselló as an incompetent and corrupt politician, but his administration came to symbolize a larger context of systemic social harm

produced by years of colonial neoliberalism, economic and financial crisis, and the violence of austerity. “The public uprising was an indictment of the entire colonial regime, not just the Rosselló clan’s malfeasance” (Cabán, 2020). The popular chant *Ricky, renuncia y llevate a la Junta* (Ricky, resign and take the Junta with you) captured the protestors' rejection of the colonial entity. However, the coverage in *El Nuevo Día* and *USA Today* during the protests did not represent these anticolonial sentiments.

While both newspapers reported on the protests that erupted in Puerto Rico, during June and July of 2019, their coverage failed to fully capture the anticolonial and anticapitalist sentiments that emerged. This article *USA Today* did not mention the anticolonial sentiments in any of their articles at the time. Meanwhile, *El Nuevo Día* (Jimenez, 2019) only mentions the protests' anticolonial sentiment in one of the articles, which reported that the demonstrators wrote on the street “Ricky Renuncia” (Ricky Resign) and “No a la Colonia” (No to the Colony) in the town of Mayagüez, West of Puerto Rico. The other articles in the newspaper failed to acknowledge the protestors’ stance against *La Junta* and U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico. By overlooking the anticolonial sentiments that emerged during the uprising, the media is complicit in reinforcing the dominant discourses that cataloged the uprising as a demonstration solely against the corruption in the local government. The media's constant failure to connect corruption with its underlying power structures limits the public from questioning the colonial and capitalist system that enables them.

While some Puerto Ricans identify colonialism as an enabling force of inequality, the corruption narrative influences many local beliefs that the islands’ social circumstances have deteriorated because of those conducts. For instance, *El Nuevo Día* published an article titled “Corruption: main barrier to economic development” (Diaz et al., 2019). Several local economists and private investors concluded that corruption was threatening to entrench itself in various branches of the local government and private sector which “could result in

something worse than the devastation caused by Hurricane María or stronger than the economic depression that Puerto Rico has been experiencing over a decade” (para.1). The interviewees expressed that the Island’s corruption was directly linked to the reduced or more expensive services in the areas of health, education, security, and roads, among other things. Again, in this article, there was no mention of the colonial relationship. This discussion shows how colonial narratives of Puerto Ricans’ corruption and inability to govern themselves can be internalized, while the US’s role in Puerto Rico’s economic pitfalls remains generally overlooked or ignored. Moreover, in this discourse, the U.S. government and investors were seen as a solution to the corruption problem.

The corruption discourse in Puerto Rico was often followed by claims of necessary external intervention to promote good governance and accountability on the Island. In the aforementioned *El Nuevo Día* article, an interviewee highlighted the need for the local government to have an open and public “dialogue” with the FOMB to regain trust from the U.S. government and investors (Diaz, Minelli-Perez, Pacheco-Santana, 2019). Similarly, federal officials often framed interventions as what Farooqui (2018) identifies as a high moral ground for action, whereby the colonizers justify their involvement “as a call of God, call of duty, call of time, a great mission or a moral duty” (Farooqui, 2018, pg. 186). For example, Zamot's statements about the local corruption were followed by claims that Puerto Rico citizens “do not have the tools necessary to hold their government accountable” and argued that the United States Congress “has the responsibility to provide Puerto Ricans with the necessary mechanisms to achieve this” (Perez-Pintado, 2019, para. 3). This statement evoked “the responsibility” of the U.S. officials to intervene with the necessary mechanisms to make the local government liable for the corruption, due to Puerto Ricans’ perceived “inability ” to do so for themselves. These narratives perpetuate the perception of a need for U.S. surveillance and intervention, reinforcing the colonial regime.

The federal discussion highlights the United States' enduring paternalistic stance over its colony. In 2019, *El Nuevo Día* documented that the Appeals Forum gave a period of 90 days for the president to name the current members or new members of the fiscal board, and for them to be confirmed by the federal Senate (Colón-Davila, Delgado, and González, 2019). At the time, the First Circuit of Appeals determined that the appointment process to the FOBM is unconstitutional. The ruling written by Judge Juan R. Torruella's reinforced that the FOMB officials hold a position of authority delegated by the U.S. administration. *El Nuevo Día* quoted:

The members of the (JSF), in short, are more like the Roman proconsuls chosen by Rome to apply a Roman law and supervise the leaders of the territories, than the local leaders who are selected, to whom Rome allows exercise certain authority (para.5).

The judge's statement suggests that the local government has limited authority, granted by the U.S. or the U.S. colonial administration, while the JSF and the U.S. government hold greater authority in Puerto Rico. This juxtaposition emphasizes the shared values of imperialism held by both the U.S. and Rome that prioritizes centralized control and authority over local autonomy and decision-making of its colonies. While the U.S. justified its colonization as a moral duty to implant its institutions and values (Cabán, 2002), Roman hegemony is also inseparable from its moralizing beliefs (Groves, 2013). Judge Torruella's statements portray the resulting policies of discourses that justify external intervention and reflect larger historical patterns of colonialism and imperialism.

The fiscal board itself is one of the interventions that Atilas (2020) coined "coloniality of anti-corruption" to help situate and describe U.S. contemporary anticorruption policies aimed at Puerto Rico. The main rationale behind the imposition of PROMESA, the law that enabled the FOMB to address the country's fiscal crisis, was that the Island's politicians have been historically engaged in unscrupulous spending, debt issuance, and the overall practice of

corruption (Atilas, 2020). Oversimplifying the Island's politicians as corrupt "created by poor governance in a weakly developed country" obscures any possibility that U.S. and International Financial Institutions' policies have influenced the conditions in which corruption exists (Atilas, 2020). Similarly, to the "episodic" view in which the newspapers frame corruption events, the local administrations implement anticorruption measures that target "petty corruption" that fail to address systematic corruption (Atilas, 2020). Meanwhile, the U.S. intervenes with "coloniality of anti-corruption" that legitimizes the U.S.'s colonial intervention, like the fiscal board, and capitalist expansion in Puerto Rico. The narrative of the "coloniality of anti-corruption" often emphasizes the private sector as a solution to corruption in the public sector (Atilas, 2020). Although U.S. intervention is presented as a vital solution for the Island's economic problems, the reality is that the "coloniality of anti-corruption" creates a "blank slate" opportunity zone attractive to U.S. investors and capitalists (Villanueva & Lebrón, 2020). In fact, 90% of the reconstruction funds received in the first year after Hurricane María were granted in contracts to US-based companies, undermining the local economy, and in some cases, failing to provide necessary services (Lamba Nieves & Santiago-Bartolomei, 2018). The supposed anticorruption efforts of the U.S. often produce capitalist measures that largely facilitate wealth extraction and profit-making, rather than promoting genuine recovery efforts (Atilas, 2020). The framing of corruption as a problem requiring external intervention, as exemplified in the case of Puerto Rico, can contribute to the perpetuation of colonialism by creating a space for outside actors to impose their own interests and values onto local communities.

I contend that the corruption narratives reinforced in the media are an example of what Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021) describe as the "perverse and persistent narratives" that emanate from Washington D.C. that systematically underlines the inability of the islanders to govern themselves. Corruption discourses, and descriptions of colonial territories and

subjects as corrupt, are a constitutive part of Western colonialism (Miller, 2008) and have been central to the justification of colonial rule in Puerto Rico for decades (Villanueva, 2019). “With these narratives, the ‘corrupted’ colonial subjects were forced to endure an intense policing regime to correct their behavior” (Villanueva, 2019, pg.109). The use of corruption discourse during the period analyzed justified fund surveillance and colonial intervention in Puerto Rico. This reflects a longstanding history of colonial discourse in Puerto Rico, where the narrative has always been used to legitimize external control and policy.

Through the use of stereotypes, racial hierarchies have been constructed and maintained, perpetuating the idea of the dominant ethnic/racial group’s superiority over the racialized colonized group (Grosfoguel, 2004). Quijano (2000) with the concept of “coloniality of power” further identifies that the present racial/ethnic hierarchy of the capitalist world system is constituted by cultural criteria that originated in colonialism. The use of distorted and exaggerated differences in stereotypes, reveals the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization (Bhabha, 2012). Stereotypes construe “the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha, 2012, p. 101). As such, the stereotypes of “lazy” and “corrupt” Puerto Ricans serve as an example of how colonialism and racism intersect in the contemporary world. These representations can further impact colonial subject who assumes the stereotype as the enunciation of their own socio-historical and cultural subjectivity.

It is important to consider the way stereotypes not only uphold the power structures but also shape the colonized subject’s perceptions of colonialism. The portrayal of the U.S. as an “anti-corruption antidote” by both colonizers and colonized is rooted in the “imperial cartographies” that produce power dynamics and influence how the colonial subject views the

relationship (Atilés et al., 2022). The power dynamic operates at both the discourse and identity, “both in what is seen and how it is seen, which is culturally constructed” (Atilés et al., 2022; Rose 2007, pg.2). In a colonial setting like Puerto Rico, the oppressor “manages to impose on the native new ways of seeing” (Fanon 1967, 38), designed to maintain the very same structures that keep them in power (Atilés et al., 2022). Ultimately, these narratives essentialize the identity of the Puerto Rican “Other” and diminish their agency to govern their own country while reinforcing the interests of the U.S. colonial and capitalist powers.

“Rhetorical inclusion”

Bhabha (2012) suggests that the colonized might disenfranchise themselves from the barriers of colonial discourse through mimicry. By identifying the ambivalence inherent in colonial discourse, mimicry can expose the contradictory and shifting nature of the ideological struggle on which the colonial relationship is based. For instance, he argues that mimicry undermines the power relations by revealing its contradiction of inclusion and exclusion in the colonial relationship. However, the argument of mimicry as a disruptive force is questionable when put into practice. As a result, this section will show that when read alongside the Puerto Rican experience, mimicry ultimately serves to reinforce colonial oppression.

After Hurricane María struck Puerto Rico, some journalists, politicians, and public figures routinely emphasized the fact that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, in an effort to demand a more effective federal aid response. Democrat U.S. political figures such as Rep. Bennie Thompson and Rep. Nydia Velázquez were quoted by USA Today, highlighting Puerto Ricans’ American citizenship to call for aid (Gaudiano, 2017; Jervis, 2018). Public figures like Full Frontal host Samantha Bee are also quoted by USA Today (Ryan, 2018) using the rhetoric, noting that many Americans were unaware of Puerto Ricans’ American

citizenship. The discourses on the topic suggested that the extent of the relief efforts depended on the perception of Puerto Ricans as American citizens.

USA Today stated that the poor knowledge of Americans of Puerto Ricans being U.S. citizens by birth, 47% of a USA Today/Suffolk University poll, “may help explain why the nation rallied behind the victims of Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Hurricane Irma in Florida but have not responded in the same way to the victims of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico” (Gomez, 2017). Similarly, an article by The New York Times republished by *El Nuevo Día* argued that referring to Puerto Ricans as American citizens was not just an act of language but also had significant implications for their survival (Dropp & Nyhan, 2017). The authors pointed out that based on a survey conducted by Morning Consult on American attitudes towards Puerto Ricans after the hurricane, both Trump supporters and Americans, in general, were more willing to provide aid if they knew that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens. Negrón-Muntaner (2018) identified that as time passed, journalists and public figures started dropping the distinction altogether, naming Puerto Ricans “Americans,” and even “our fellow Americans.”

The discourse ultimately used by journalists, politicians, and public figures, urged for federal help using the term Americans interchangeably with Puerto Ricans. This resulted in a “historically rare gesture: rhetorical incorporation” in which Americans responded by including Puerto Ricans as part of the larger American community (Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). One of the first outlets to do so was the Weather Channel, whose anchors and reporters, especially Paul Goodloe, repeatedly mentioned that Puerto Ricans were Americans (Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). This thesis identified that USA Today journalists also used “Americans” interchangeable with “Puerto Ricans” in their coverage. A USA Today article following the catastrophe stated: “Tens of thousands of Americans on the island had been without power since the storm” (Hafner, 2018, para. 2). The journalist even made a comparison with the

amount of “Americans impacted” and the populations of Vermont, Montana, and New Hampshire combined. The rhetoric of incorporation aimed to provide Puerto Ricans with temporary relief but ultimately failed to address the colonial system that has perpetuated the unequal treatment in the first place and ignored Puerto Ricans' unique national identity.

The rhetoric of incorporation specifically ignored the intersection of climate change, modern colonialism, and Trumpism which led to an unequal response to the disaster (Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). Negrón-Muntaner states that the use of “our fellow Americans,” as a rhetorical strategy, specifically without accompanying political action, is ineffective against the racist and colonial system that withholds resources from marginalized people. Through this lens, this discourse reinforces the power dynamics that maintain colonialism instead of working toward decolonization addressing colonialism as the underlying issue. Moreover, emphasizing citizenship status alone as the basis of inclusion overlooks the fact that citizenship has never guaranteed rights for racialized people, who are not seen as fully human, to begin with (Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). Regardless, some Puerto Ricans felt summoned by the discourse.

Several local public figures like singer Mark Anthony and the playwright Lin Manuel Miranda used the term “Americans” interchangeably with “Puerto Ricans” in *El Nuevo Día* coverage (Combinados, 2017). In the same article titled: “‘Puerto Rico is part of America!’ the claim of several celebrities” the Brooklyn native with Puerto Rican heritage actress Rosie Perez is quoted saying “We are Americans!” on a tweet criticizing the slow federal response. On this lens, Governor Rosselló is also quoted in a *USA Today* article saying that “it is the time to channel every effort to improve the lives of over 3 million Americans in Puerto Rico” (Cummings, 2018). The use of American citizenship to urge for a federal response was later adopted as a broader political strategy.

Politicians from the statehood party, which sought the annexation of Puerto Rico as the 51st state of the U.S. echoed the rhetorical discourse of incorporation. As November 03, 2020, referendum approached, the now-governor Pedro Pierluisi, stated in an interview with *El Nuevo Día* (2020) that it was time that Puerto Ricans demanded equality as “American citizens.” Pierluisi, and other PNP politicians, described annexation to ensure Puerto Ricans were treated equally in the U.S. legal system. Yet it often went further. Puerto Rico’s resident commissioner in Washington, Jenniffer González, said that it was time to advocate for statehood and “say yes to our American nation” (Colón-Davila, 2020). By utilizing the possessive determinant “ours,” González projected the idea that Puerto Ricans were citizens already part of the “American nation.” The ideology of incorporation positioned Puerto Ricans as part of the American identity imaginary.

This assimilation and self-identification of Puerto Ricans into the American identity can be seen as an act of mimicry, as described by Bhabha. This is the subaltern's intent to imitate the superior. The imitative process emerges as a complex and powerful tool for individuals who find themselves caught between the desire for identity and the panoptical vision of domination (Bhabha, 2012). Mimicry, Bhabha adds, is one of the most successful and elusive strategies for achieving this “ironic compromise” (p.122). With it, the colonial subject conforms to opportunistic behavior in the ambivalence of the colonial relationship. An act that Bhabha also describes as “camouflage”. The ambivalent nature of the colonial discourse, which is both nurturing and exclusionary, presents the colonial subject with an opportunity to distance itself from the stereotypical depictions by navigating itself in the colonized view of “civilization” (Bhabha, 2012).

The object of desire and key to survival through mimicry is whiteness (Byer, 2019). Mimicry itself reveals the ambivalence of the colonial discourse as it poses the colonial Other as inferior, yet ‘civilized’ enough to be enunciated in the language of the colonial power as

'equal.' But regardless of this intent, the colonized subject is never divorced from cultural and racial discrimination experienced in everyday life. This double identification results in a mimicry that is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 2012, p.122). Although the colonized strive to imitate the colonizer's "whiteness," their imitation is similar but never identical, shaped by the colonial discourse and cultural and racial discriminations they face.

The newspapers' coverage reveals the annexationists' acknowledgment of historical cultural and racial stereotypes that fixate on the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship, despite viewing assimilation as a means towards equality. In another interview, González affirmed that although the United States' original policy was that all of the territories were eventually going to become a state, "racial and cultural prejudice" excluded Puerto Rico and other non-incorporated territories from this transition after the Spanish-American War. Meanwhile, Pierluisi said that all of the discriminatory practices against other non-white groups in the U.S. have been "corrected," but not yet those towards Puerto Ricans (Colón-Davila, 2020). This assertion is misleading because it disregards that there are still significant instances of discrimination and inequality faced by non-white groups in the United States, even if some discriminatory practices have been addressed. However, it serves to show the self-identification of Puerto Ricans as part of the larger marginalized groups by the status quo, while still aiming to ascribe to the imagined American community. Under such rhetoric, both politicians see themselves as U.S. citizens deserving of similar treatment as those whom they consider equals.

Former governor Pedro Rosselló's opinion piece in USA Today also serves to analyze the liminal space that Puerto Rico's colonial subjects occupy. In the article, *Puerto Rico has become a colonial ghetto*. Time to make it the 51st state, Rosselló (2018) claims:

Under federal statute, Puerto Ricans became and are now natural-born U. S. citizens, but with a caveat: Citizenship comes with limited rights compared with those of other

U. S. citizens. Among those: The right to vote in national elections, the right to have voting representation in Congress, the right to participate equally in federal health programs such as Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, and others as long as they, or any other Americans, live on the island. The law established a colonial ghetto (para. 5).

On the one hand, Rosselló calls out the discriminatory practices of the U.S., and, on the other hand, invokes the so-called "traditional values of the republic." While recognizing that Puerto Ricans have been historically marginalized, he sees this as "an exception" rather than inherent to the original values of the imperial regime. Finally, he states the law established a colonial "ghetto" to describe the segregation caused by the island's political status. Calling Puerto Rico solely as a "colony" would imply the submission of Puerto Rico as a "foreign country" in the visage of an empire. However, by adding the word "ghetto," if looked at from its epistemological definition, Rosselló called out discrimination inflicted towards constituents of the nation.

The mimicry present in this assimilationist discourse, ultimately could serve to challenge the authorized difference of the colonized subject, which is repeated throughout the stereotypes (Bhabha, 2012). Bhabha sees mimicry as a challenge to the colonial binary of colonizers' humanity and colonized sub-humanity, creating a space for alternative forms of identity and agency to appear through menace. Bhabha (2012) argues that mimicry poses a threat to the colonial civilizing mission when the mimic's movement between "mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing, but not quite – to menace a difference that is almost total but not quite" (pg.131). "As stereotyped, the postcolonial other 'is' invisible, silent, present in the form of an absence. But, in that invisibility, there is the menace of mimicry conditioning the possibility of an alternative mode of transgressive practice" (Sealey, 2018, pg. 168). In the context of Puerto Ricans, the threat would arise from the challenges presented

to the traditional notions of what it means to be American and blurring the boundaries of belonging, potentially destabilizing the exclusive nature of the white American identity. In this view, the mimic would find the promise of counter-domination insofar as the colonial scene names her in terms of "what she is not" (Sealey, 2018).

While subversion through mimicry can disrupt the colonial authority of binary identifications, it does not necessarily constitute a form of belonging of the self for the colonial subject because it happens through the erasure of self-presence and operates within the parameters of that erasure's paradigm (Sealey, 2018). Puerto Rican scholars have already critiqued the use of the term "Americans" towards Puerto Ricans due to its erasure of the islanders' long struggles against colonialism and their unique national identity (Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). In other words, mimicry does not lead to subversion of the colonial regime to the extent that it does not contribute to the colonized subject's ability to create a sense of belonging, which is a vital aspect of a liberatory experience (Sealey, 2018; Ortega, 2014; Lugones, 1990). Fanon, contrary to Bhabha, seeks for other forms of liberation because he sees in the colonial discourse the option of 'turn white or disappear.' Although Bhabha sees in mimicry a disruption of the authority of colonial discourse, it fails to acknowledge the subjugation made plausible by such interaction. Rather than being a liberatory experience, mimicry can be understood as part of a neo-classical power discourse that recognizes power as operating at multiple level of society, involving the agency of individual and groups. If one considers Puerto Ricans as predominantly subaltern (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021), mimicry suggests that Puerto Ricans can speak and potentially be heard without fully conforming to the dominant cultural norms. However, when analyzing mimicry in the context of Puerto Ricans, it suggests a threat to the natives' national consciousness. So far mimicry takes the values of the dominant culture that it sees as favorable, its intent of assimilation alienates the subject from its own cultural identity, as well as from the broader subaltern community.

The next chapter suggests that from the ambivalence of the colonial relationship, or the “nonbeing,” there is a possibility of other forms of resistance to emerge outside the “edges” of political life. Despite the challenges posed by conflicting ideals and the assimilationist discourse, there may be other ways for colonized subjects to resist and assert their agency. These forms of resistance may not fit neatly into established political categories or discourses, but they nonetheless have the potential to challenge dominant power structures and create new possibilities for political life.

Resisting the colonial narrative

The analysis of colonial discourse in the newspapers suggests that while mimicry is used as a form of decolonization through assimilation, it ultimately reinforces the power structures and can lead to perpetuating the subaltern status of marginalized groups. Despite the challenges posed by the ambivalence in colonial discourse, Puerto Ricans have resisted colonialism since the Spanish colonial period (Bergard, 1980) and continue to do through the present day through cultural and political activism. Such “spaces of resistance are inevitable” (Montás & Rubi, 2022) because people often feel compelled to push back against these forces in order to assert their agency and challenge the power dynamics. In this lens, newspapers can provide a space for decolonizing where other forms of resistance can be made plausible. This section explores the articulation of resistance discourse in the media and its implications on decolonial efforts.

Both newspapers provided a platform for local politicians to criticize the federal response during the recovery efforts from the hurricane. The narrative shared by former president Trump was counteracted by the then Mayor of San Juan Carmen Yulín who bashed Washington's response and was covered by both US Today and El Nuevo Día. Yulín's quotes ranged from comments on the Tonight Show cataloging Trump as an “abuser” for his remarks against Puerto Ricans (Ayala-Gordián, 2017) to critics of the recovery response

calling out the “ridiculous obsession” with making the federal government relief efforts “a good news story” (Bustos, 2018). The inclusion of the counter-narrative, particularly of Puerto Rican leaders, provided a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the situation, countering the dominant narrative of the federal government’s successful response. Although both newspapers covered Yulin’s and others who were critical of the recovery efforts, only El Nuevo Día shared perspectives against the colonial regime.

In addition to covering Yulin’s comments, El Nuevo Día (Quintero, 2019) also interviewed members of the legislature and delegates of the Republican Party in Puerto Rico to gather their opinions about Trump’s claims. While most of the politicians interviewed by El Nuevo Día dismissed Trump’s comments, PIP senator Denis Marquéz was quoted stating that such comments reflect “the US policy towards its colony” (Quintero, 2019). He also suggested that Trump’s critics “are a reflection of himself” because Puerto Rican politics is a copy and an extension of the U.S. colonial model. Marquéz then goes on to say that although this reflects on the colonial regime, it does not cease to be a contempt against the people of Puerto Rico. From a postcolonial analysis, Marquéz points out the ambivalence of the colonial discourse and the hybridity created through the colonial encounter. Bhabha (2012) asserts that this hybridization is not a one-way street, and mutually constructs the colonizer and the colonized identities by exchange and negotiation. With the assertion that Puerto Rican politics reflect that of its colonizer, Marquéz’s acknowledges the hybridization made plausible by colonization particularly through the implementation of the colonizers institutions and systems. However, as his comments suggests, the stereotype does not cease to be discriminatory because it perpetuates unequal power dynamics and reinforces marginalization of the colonized people. Marquéz’s response resists the colonial stereotypical depiction of Puerto Ricans, while compelling the American to look inward and examine its own systems of oppression which make the corruption plausible in the first place.

Other scholars viewed the corruption discourse through the same lens highlighting the corruption inherent in colonialism. In an opinion article published by *El Nuevo Día* (San Inocencio, 2019) about the demonstrations of the Summer of 2019, a PIP politician and lawyer Victor García San Inocencio argues:

That political misery to which colonialism has exposed us, which is ratified every day with the opinion of the territorial plenary power of Congress and its Board, is at the core of the hyper-corruptibility of local government. This should not be read as a deterministic diagnosis, nor as a justification, of course not. What must be underlined is that due to its spurious, degrading, and criminal nature, the colonial condition is toxic, and its environment is much more corrupt and corruptible. The colony is degrading because it degrades the citizens and dissolves the *Demos*, because it interiorizes, and because it submits an entire people and its facsimile of government, to political underdevelopment under the boot of another people (para. 3).

This passage examines the negative effects of colonialism on the political and social systems of the colonized territory. San Inocencio (2019) argues that the “political misery” that colonialism has created is responsible for the high levels of corruption in the local government. This is not to say that corruption is inevitable, but rather that colonialism has created a toxic environment that is conducive to corrupt behavior. The protests not only evidenced the colonial regime’s relationship with the corruption in the local government but also served as an eye-opening experience of the class division in the colony and its interrelation with corruption.

Writer Eduardo Lalo recognized the compliance and resistance prevalent in the colonized subject and the class struggle in such processes. If the recent protest against Rosselló demonstrates anything, he said, “it is that his government is not, as has been said, a millennial government, but rather one of the colonized elites” (Lalo, 2019). He then uses the

term “colonized elite,” to describe all the governors under the colonial regime. The colonized elite, Fanon had argued, is the fabrication of the West and serves to collaborate with the colonizers' capitalist interests (Fanon, 1965). Lalo adds that “to affirm that the country has serious cultural problems in disadvantaged sectors is not new, but there is a reluctance to confront the very low cultural formation of privileged sectors, who have confused obtaining a diploma with their development as people” (para. 5). Such analysis mirrors Fanon's arguments that the colonized elite are granted some privileges and benefits by the colonizers, such as education, and wealth, but whose involvement in the colonial regime often results in a loss of self-identity and disconnect from their own people and country.

The concept of mimicry is related to the colonized elite discussed by Lalo and Fanon because through mimicry the subject ascribes to the culture and values of the dominant group often favoring the privileged position in the colonial regime. The assimilation of Puerto Ricans as Americans, in this sense, is made plausible by adopting the culture and values of the colonizers in the promise of existence. What follows is a colonized elite that through mimicry become disconnected from their own people and community. In other words, by mimicking the colonizer, they perpetuate the power structures that oppress their people. Another article by *El Nuevo Día* (Torres Gotay, 2019) captured this sentiment stating that one of the pressing concerns of Puerto Rican citizens in assemblies throughout the country after Governor Rosselló resigned was the “disconnection of the political class and the country” (para.18). Fanon (1965) deems that an important aspect of decolonization is the recognition of the colonized elite as a fabrication of the West. But following this realization, he advocated for the development of a national consciousness that is rooted in the experiences and culture of the colonized people, which will enable them to lead the struggle for liberation. In this way, decolonization involves not only the overthrow of the colonial regime but also the cultural, social, and economic transformation of the colonized society. By

doing so, the colonized people can reclaim and establish their own economic and political institutions that respond to the colonized cultural identity and interests.

The quest for political liberation, in this lens, requires recognition and solidification of a cultural “national consciousness” (Fanon, 1997). The “national consciousness” to which Fanon refers is distinct from what has been articulated as nationalism in Puerto Rico through the 20th century. Nation-building has been a longstanding theme of Puerto Rican independence leaders such as Ramón Emeterio Betances and Pedro Albizu Campos. The nationalist discourse in Puerto Rico, however, has traditionally excluded Blacks from the nation-building project. “The cultural nationalist project of the archipelago entrenched the power of a white, male, land-owning, and professionalized “criollo bloc” (a term coined by Joaquín Villanueva, Martín Cobián, and Félix Rodríguez in *San Juan: The Fragile City* [2018]” (Santiago Ortiz, 2023, pg.184). Duany (2000) states that the quest for nation-building of the period has also been characterized by Hispanophilia, anti-Americanism, Negrophobia, androcentrism, homophobia, and most recently xenophobia by the exclusion of other minority groups like Cubans and Dominicans immigrants on the Island. Nationalism, in this sense, differs from Fanon's idea of “national consciousness” because it fails to be inclusive of marginalized communities. Revolutionary internationalism, for Fanon, is a new form of humanism that is intersectional and solidary for all the oppressed people.

Today, nationalism is no longer the leading political ideology in Puerto Rico as it was in the early decades of the twentieth century (Duany, 2000). Duany argues that the shift away from nationalism as the dominant political ideology can be traced back to the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1952. During this period, populism replaced nationalism as the dominant discourse on cultural identity, with many Puerto Ricans asserting their identity under the colonial regime through common citizenship and permanent union with the United States (Duany, 2000). Muñoz Marín and his political party, the populares, were successful in

separating the practical implications of continued political dependence on another country from the day-to-day assertion of cultural uniqueness (Duany, 2000). Duany also suggests that Puerto Rico is a “nation on the move” due to the circular migration that has continued to influence Puerto Rican identity formation. Although Puerto Ricans have asserted their identity in the “in-between,” a recent study (Cuevas-Molina & Cámara-Fuentes, 2022) suggests a relationship between identity and political ideology. Using data from the 1989-90 Latino National Political Survey and the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study Latino Module, the authors found that high English proficiency, being born in the U.S., and identifying primarily as “American” are all predictive of a preference for statehood. They also identified that those whose primary identity was “Puerto Rican,” have on preference for independence and territorial status. This analysis shows that, although Puerto Ricans have become hybrid subjects influenced by migration, globalization, and colonialism, cultural identity continues to have a direct relation to political affiliation.

New forms of national identity and resistance have emerged evident in the increased visibility of anticolonial, antiracist feminist organizations that have long called out anti-Blackness in the archipelago (Lloréns, 2021). This identity building resembles more what was discussed by Fanon as “national consciousness” as it stems from the bottom up. Black feminist collectives in Puerto Rico have taken a leading role in promoting community-centered change. According to journalist Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, they have played a crucial role in keeping the nation together, despite facing discrimination for centuries (Guzmán, 2019) and being often overlooked (Lloréns, 2021). These groups have worked tirelessly to address a range of issues, including gender-based violence, economic inequality, and political marginalization. These articulations embraced a more intersectional notion of Puerto Rican identity than that of the more traditional perspectives. Hence, the reading of the news

coverage during the period analyzed the portrayal of the emergence of these intersectional and transnational identities.

During the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, and the earthquakes that impacted the Island, feminist organizations were leading the immediate recuperation efforts through *autogestión* (Zambrana, n.a.). Although these undertakings were not articulated in USA Today, El Nuevo Día documented the work by some feminist organizations like Proyecto Matria, La Colectiva Feminista en Contrucción, Taller Salud, and Morirviví (Fullana-Acosta, 2017; Caro-Gonzaléz, 2019; Delgado, 2020b; Caro-Gonzaléz, 2020). The coverage showed that these feminist organizations immediately helped the community even as they struggled with a lack of funds (Arroyo, 2019). Since the crisis made women more vulnerable to domestic violence, unemployment, and migration (Bauzá,2017), the failed federal response intensified these inequalities. Feminist organizations and activists identified the connections between the failed federal response, colonialism, and women’s oppression (Fullana Acosta, 2017). One of the El Nuevo Día articles quoted the chant from a feminist protest that said “Water, food, and get rid of the militia” (Fullana Acosta, 2017), as a clear opposition to the U.S. militarized aid. In stark contrast to the U.S. officials' claims of lack of community help, two years after the hurricane, Beatriz Grau Pelegrí, coordinator of the Moriviví organization, maintained that authorities should understand that "local communities work with greater speed and agility” and expressed a disconnect of the federal agencies with grassroots organizations (Delgado, 2020b). Local activists also criticized how the reconstruction process in Puerto Rico does not escape the colonial relationship by failing to listen and include in the decision-making the communities it serves, including the academia. Professor Cecilio Ortiz and co-founder of the Instituto Nacional de Energía y Sostenibilidad Isleña, an interdisciplinary platform that identifies and connects all the energy resources of the University of Puerto Rico, that both FEMA and Congress must “listen to the solutions

that are presented from the Puerto Rican academy” (para. 3). He added that while civil society is not integrated into decision-making about the recovery of the island, U.S. corporations like the Rand Corporation, had to depend on Puerto Rican academics to find the information they need to write the reports. “That is academic colonialism,” he said. El Nuevo Día covered to some extent the actions of feminist activists and organizations in the aftermath of the hurricane but to a lesser extent the liberatory consciousness that arise from the community encounters of Hurricane Maria and after the protests of the Summer of 2019.

Although there were not many articles on the subject, in an article for Magacín (2019), El Nuevo Día magazine, several women explicitly called out colonialism and its interrelation with racism, class, and gender oppression. Lourdes A. Torres Santos, Member of the Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico and Montessori Teacher at the Republic of Peru School, San Juan, argued for an accessible and quality public education that tackles these interrelations. “We really need to live democracy, peace, and human rights; and for this, we must have a curriculum that breaks with colonialism, patriarchy and with the exploitation of the Earth and all living being” (para. 14). Talking about the “historic moment” of the national protests, filmmaker Mariem Pérez said that Puerto Ricans need to educate themselves about the history of Puerto Rico and “start from below” to demand more from local politicians and not endure as they have done for so long with colonialism. Similarly, Mayra Santos Febres, a Puerto Rican writer, advocated for a more diverse representation in the political sector and called out the exclusionary practices that emanate from the colonized elite that has ruled the island. “We cannot go back to the government of the “all white boys club” where decisions are supposedly made on behalf of an entire country” (para. 5). Once again, the discontent with the local government’s policies and actions is a result from their disconnect with the population they are meant to serve. Vivian Neptune Dean of the Law School of the University of Puerto Rico, made a similar claim:

If, on the other hand, we have a sector with power and in charge of the direction of the country that does not know poverty, racism, sexism, or marginalization, they will not be able to articulate effective measures because they lack the empathy and sensitivity to understand the dramatic deficiencies of a great section of our society (para. 6).

The passage highlights the voices of women who are calling for more inclusive and empathetic leadership in Puerto Rico. Overall, the claims made in this article show the emergence of a “national consciousness” from above that is intersectional and aware of the diverse forms of oppression in capitalist and colonial settings.

Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness also addresses this geography, where I believe the struggles for liberation in Puerto Rico are headed. In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987) argued that those who identified as *a mestiza*, or those who live at the intersection of multiple identities, experience a unique consciousness that transcends binary thinking. Her analysis illuminates the ambiguity and contradictions of being in the “in-between,” a space that is also used to describe the hybrid identity of the colonial subject (Bhabha, 2012). This “mestiza consciousness,” similar to Fanon's term “national consciousness,” involves recognizing the diversity and complexity of identity in order to challenge the dominant narratives that reinforce power structures and oppress marginalized groups. A central aspect of both terms is the importance to navigate and connect with different cultural communities. The struggle for spatial power, in which such decolonial efforts arise, incites new ways of thinking that allow asserting a national consciousness that also enables Black women to liberate themselves.

In their coverage, Both USA Today and El Nuevo Día offered the counternarrative of stereotypical depictions of Puerto Ricans by local leaders but mostly neglected the perspectives of marginalized communities. Some opinion pieces in El Nuevo Día offered perspectives from citizens, writers, and academics that were not found in any of the other

sections of the newspaper. El Nuevo Día satisfactorily mentioned the feminist organizations and other grassroots groups that worked during the recovery from catastrophes. Such articles gave the opportunity for activists to counteract the idea that Puerto Ricans were not proactive in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and the subsequent earthquakes. However, the coverage lacked an engagement with the ideological perspectives in which these organizations operate. The neglect of the newspapers to cover the imagined futures that originate from the anticolonial struggles of Black feminists perpetuate what Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021) identify as a Marcusian unidimensional sense, which is that of a Puerto Rico that cannot be any other thing than what it is now. Such fatalist discourses need to be first “totally denounced” (Freire, 1996) to transform the powerless into a force capable of proclaiming justice (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The analysis of media coverage of Hurricane María and its aftermath in Puerto Rico up to the 2020 elections in El Nuevo Día and USA Today reveals that news media institutions both contest and uphold colonial discourse. The binary distinction between the American “Self” and Puerto Rican “Other” was constructed in both newspapers by stereotypes and high moral ground of actions, which were signs identified by Farooqui (2018) in colonial discourse. The historical claims of Puerto Ricans being “lazy” and “corrupt” perpetuated stereotypes and power imbalance. These narratives impacted the aid received after the hurricane and legitimized economic and political surveillance and neocolonial policies on the island. Although the rhetoric of Puerto Ricans as “lazy” and “corrupt” has its origin in the nineteenth century (Rodriguez, 1998), this thesis shows that it continues to be used as a justification for why Puerto Ricans are incapable of managing their government. The ambivalence of the discourse is what ensures the colonial stereotypes' currency because it can change historical and discursive conjunctures; inform its strategies of individuation and marginalization and

produce that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be more than what can be empirically proved or logically construed (Bhabha, 2012). The continued use of colonial stereotypes underlines the importance of ongoing critical analysis of media coverage and discourse surrounding Puerto Rico and other marginalized communities.

Along with the conventional forms of colonial discourse, the coverage had an “unusual gesture” of “rhetorical incorporation” in which Puerto Ricans were addressed as “Americans.” Although this rhetoric was aimed to advocate for temporary relief after Hurricane María, the use of persuasive language to include Puerto Ricans did not effectively solve the underlying issues of the colonial regime. Hence it served to foreclose the colonial relationship that created the ineffective federal response in the first place. This blind spot helped supporters of statehood on the island and the U.S. argue in favor of annexation without assigning responsibility to or questioning which power structures and discourses uphold the colonial status. Local politicians reaffirmed Puerto Ricans' U.S. citizenship in their claims to advocate for statehood in the non-binding plebiscite of September 03, 2020. Annexationists recognized the cultural and racial discriminatory characterizations that uphold the colonial regime. However, they viewed assimilation to the colonizers' identity as a path to equal treatment, resulting in what Bhabha (2012) identifies as mimicry. Bhabha (2012) sees mimicry as a transgression of colonial authority as it shakes the existing binary distinctions of the “Self” and the “Other.” But upon further analysis, this thesis showed how this form of anticolonialism threatened the colonized subject's ability to create a sense of belonging outside of the realms of ambiguity. The conflicting ideals of anticolonialism and annexation that co-exist in these discussions can only do so as part of a discourse that seeks the assimilation of Puerto Ricans as Americans.

Ultimately, the “rhetorical inclusion” narrative resulted to be problematic for four reasons: (1) It does not recognize the cultural and racial categorizations that impact Puerto

Ricans' experience vis-a-vis other U.S. citizens (2) It does not recognize colonialism and the colonial policies that propelled the unequal federal response (3) It does not assign responsibility towards the impact of Americans colonial regime to Puerto Ricans, and (4) It disregards Puerto Ricans' national identity. As this thesis showed, this discourse was present in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and impacted the political discourse in the archipelago. By recognizing the impact of cultural and racial categorizations, colonialism, and Puerto Ricans' national identity, we can better understand the historical and political factors that shape their experience. Instead of relying on symbolic gestures of empty rhetoric, the discussion should prioritize concrete policy changes that address the root of the problem: colonialism, while providing space for a decolonial consciousness to emerge.

As for the news media, *El Nuevo Día* and *USA Today* showed a lack of stories of human interest, focusing primarily on institutional. This absence of representation reinforces power imbalances and perpetuates colonial power dynamics. Similarly, Davis (2020) found that newspaper coverage of Hurricane María was more politically framed than coverage of Hurricane Harvey, which may have contributed to binary thinking of Puerto Rico's relationship with the US. The newspapers also lacked a recognition of the economic, social, political, and cultural complexities that create the U.S. - PR colonial relationship. Neither *El Nuevo Día* nor *USA Today* referred to Puerto Rico as a colony in their editorials, nor did the journalists in any of the news articles analyzed from this period. The newspapers referred to Puerto Rico as a "territory" and "commonwealth" in the articles analyzed. The use of phrases such as "commonwealth" or "self-governing territory" cloud the history and the enduring legacy of U.S. occupation and help obscure the voices of Puerto Ricans (González-Martínez, 2021). Moreover, during the political turmoil in the Summer of 2019, the media outlets failed to identify the uprising as an anticolonial movement. The media outlet's failure to accurately portray the historical and contextual aspects of U.S. colonialism and its manifestation is a

journalistic failure. To address this omission, journalists could provide context about why Puerto Rico is considered a colony, along with the perspectives of those who are fighting for decolonization.

El Nuevo Día and USA Today lightly provided some of the counternarratives of the federal response by local politicians which would allow readers a more comprehensive portrayal of the federal response to Hurricane María. Meanwhile, El Nuevo Día was more representative in portraying the decolonial narratives that emerged throughout its news coverage and opinion pieces. The newspaper opinion pieces critically analyzed colonialism and criticized the colonial discourse that positioned Puerto Ricans as corrupt and unable to govern themselves. The feminist activists interviewed in some of the articles emphasized the importance of recognizing the intersecting oppression of race, class, and gender in colonialism. However, the failure of newspapers to report on the way these Black feminists envision intersectional decolonization contributes to a public discourse that narrows the possibilities of Puerto Rico's future. This narrowed view perpetuates what Subervi-Vélez et al. (2021) identify as a Marcusean unidimensional sense, which is that of a Puerto Rico that cannot be any other thing than what it is now. To challenge this fatalistic viewpoint, they argue, it is necessary to reject it entirely (Freire, 1996) to transform the powerless into a force capable of proclaiming justice.

One possible explanation of the power imbalance of coverage is the model that enables journalism to thrive under the capitalist regime. That is that the news media provides news to create audiences into commodities that can later be exposed to advertisement, sales, and political influence (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). This model has allowed journalism to thrive in the West while exercising control over what is objective truth (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). Consequently, the media outlets' pursuit of objective truth has left them closely tied to the current status quo. For example, the coverage of the corruption discourse was often followed

by claims of necessary extremal surveillance to promote good governance and accountability on the island. These narratives justified the continuation of the colonial regime, as well as U.S. investors' interventions plunging the island into a vicious cycle of dependency. The pursuit of objectivity leads the news media outlets to prioritize the perspectives of the elites, at the expense of counter-narratives emerging from resistance movements. As a result, the newspapers not only perpetuated harmful stereotypes but also failed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic, cultural, and social situation in Puerto Rico.

Ideally, the analysis of the public discussions about Puerto Ricans in the newspapers shed light on the role of colonial discourse as a tool for maintaining colonialism. As well as fill gaps in the intersection of communication and postcolonial studies. A limitation arose in the data collection process because, unlike the Factiva database used to search for the USA Today articles, El Nuevo Día online page does not provide an option to download the articles in bulk. Reviewing El Nuevo Día articles individually was a time-consuming process, and it was also less efficient for conducting keyword searches between articles. Future work could expand on the direct impact of the colonial discourse on individual and collective identities in Puerto Rico, or how it intersects with other forms of oppression and resistance. Other studies could analyze the coverage in newspapers that often challenge the traditional model making of news such as the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo in Puerto Rico (Subervi-Vélez et al., 2021). Additionally, future research can explore social media's role in shaping the public mediated discussion. Although journalists deem official sources, like press releases from government institutions, as more credible and important than other sources (Morales et al, 2021), tweets from politicians, including Trump, are cited as reliable sources of information more frequently in news stories (Heim, 2021). Tweets were part of the coverage in both USA Today and El Nuevo Día, particularly those of Trump, although other discussions on social media were not

given the same platform. Given the importance of social media, the use of online platforms to reproduce and/or contest colonial discourse would be an important study for future researchers.

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