

Madness: Gender, Race, and Religion in Loíza, Puerto Rico

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ABSTRACT

Alejandro Stephano Escalante: Madness: Gender, Race, and Religion in Loíza, Puerto Rico
(Under the direction of Todd Ramón Ochoa)

This dissertation focuses on the cultural productions of gender, race, and religion by festival characters called “*locas*” and the ways in which these “madwomen” perform, exceed, and upend the socially constructed categories of gender, race, and religion. La loca is a character who appears during the annual celebration of *las fiestas tradicionales en honor a Santiago Apóstol* (la fiesta). She is played by men who dress like women and who darken their already Black skin with makeup. I argue that la loca’s performances, a mixture of drag and minstrel-esque costuming, are ways of inhabiting madness that destabilize fixed notions of subjectivity. In post-Enlightenment schemas, “the subject” is defined in relation to “Man,” who is singular, articulate, productive, and, ultimately, God-like. In contrast to Man, la loca evades these classifications and instead performs multiplicity, ineffability, playfulness, and the death of God. Through these performances, I chart the movement of la loca inside and outside of la fiesta.

To Loiceños past and present

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INTRODUCTION: LA LOCA

Dear reader, you may have to think madly. Blackly.
—Therí Alyce Pickens¹

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.
—William Shakespeare²

During *las fiestas en honor a Santiago Apóstol (la fiesta)* in Loíza, Puerto Rico, as we processed the images of Santiago, madwomen wandered the streets causing trouble. These madwomen transgress boundaries of proper gender, race, and religion through their mischievous performances of racialized femininity. My first encounter with *la loca* was while I sat on my front porch in the Medianía Alta barrio of Loíza.

It was mid-July, humid, and a band of dark clouds brooded off shore. Hurricane season had just begun and there was a cool but reverent tranquility in the air. After María, storms were taken seriously. The sun, however, did not let up. Sitting, I could feel my body growing sticky with sweat. The shade of the porch only offset the surrounding temperatures by a few degrees, if that, but I was thankful nonetheless for the reprieve. Shade was precious in Loíza. Loiceños know that and so they set up temporary canopies to sit under, to sell their wares, to spectate, and to gossip as the procession of images and characters go by.

From my porch, just over the line of canopies along calle 187, I could see the procession of people make its way from Pueblo to Medianía Alta, from the center of Loíza to the eastern barrio where I lived. Processors danced, played music, sang hymns, and drank Medalla as they

¹ Therí Alyce Pickens, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), xi.

² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 70.

made their way from La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio to La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol, the church named St. James, the Apostle (from the Old Spanish, *Sant Iago*). The crowd who accompanied the images of Santiago bumped up against each other, spilled drinks, stole looks and kisses, and looked more like a chaotic river coursing through a city than a neat, solemn religious procession. In the midst of this chaos, a visitor appeared.

She opened the small gate that separated my temporary home from the world without asking. Before I knew it, she was making her way up the sidewalk of my front yard. She carried a tree branch in one hand and a tin can in the other. When our eyes met, she called out, in a sing-song kind of way “*¡Hola!*” as if she knew me. I thought she must be looking for someone else, maybe someone who used to live there. It is not uncommon for people in Loíza to stop by their neighbor’s houses unannounced. More often than not, it is by chance. Unplanned, as they make their way somewhere else, someone will see their friends out on their porches and stop to chat. Two phrases punctuate these impromptu conversations: “*tengo que ir*” (“I have to go,”), and “*fíjate*” (something like “picture this”). I, however, did not know this woman. Our conversation was stilted, formal. I only smiled and gave the customary “*¡Buenas tardes!*” in response. To my surprise, she was looking for me. She was not there by mistake.

She was a stranger who made herself, or tried to make herself, familiar. She broached the material and invisible barrier between the intimate world of my home and the impersonal world outside of it. She walked casually up to me, started a conversation, all as if she knew me. Stranger than this, though, was how she was dressed. It was just after 2pm and there she was, in her slippers and her nightgown, called a “*bata*.” She was dressed for bed, not for walking the streets of Loíza, and much less for a religious procession. Her lipstick covered more than her lips and I could see traces of it on her teeth; her *bata* was ill-fitting. “Must be a hand me down,” I

thought to myself. Her hair was wrapped in a bandana, pulling it away from her face. Her face was excessively dirty, almost purposefully so. The “dirt” was too neatly placed for it to be from work. Her movement up the sidewalk was confident. “*Loca*,” I thought.

She would swing the branch in front of her feet, moving the dirt and debris from her path to the side. Given that her tree branch-broom did not have the tight bristles of a conventional broom, it did not seem to do very much. When she finally reached the threshold of the porch, she made her case: she asked to be paid for cleaning the sidewalk in front of my rented home. After a few seconds, what felt like minutes, of playful negotiating around her demands, she moved on to my neighbor Hilda’s house and did the same—cleaning and asking for money for the unrequested work. As she exited through the small chain-link gate that partitioned our homes from the street, she muttered some indecipherable words under her breath, and rattled the few coins in her aluminum can. She continued along, sweeping and rattling.

Fíjate: la loca is no “regular” woman. She is an *extra*-ordinary woman. Beyond ordinary. Excessively beyond womanhood, in fact. “La loca” means “the crazy woman” or “madwoman.” She is a character that appears in many festivals in Puerto Rico but is especially popular during las fiestas tradicionales en honor a Santiago Apóstol in Loíza. La fiesta is an annual Catholic feast held in honor of St. James and is now spread across ten days. In the midst of this city-wide celebration, there is a three-day procession of images of Santiago down calle 187, the main thoroughfare of the city. As the images are processed from one church to another, the processional crowd grows larger and more raucous with carnival-like costuming and wild characters joining the procession of images. La loca is one of these characters. She is played by already dark-skinned men, who cross-dress and perform “drag”—that is, they dress and behave like women. Along with the bata and slippers, performers will often put on wigs and a

handkerchief around their head, as if to keep the sweat off their brow from their hard sweeping. They stuff their shirts and trousers to give the impression of breasts and larger buttocks, they will paint their (already brown and black) faces darker with makeup, and carry around a makeshift broom to sweep, and a tin can to collect payment. La loca is full of juxtaposition and contradiction that confounds fixed notions of “home,” “gender,” and “religion.” She is madness. She is loca.

Traditionally, terms like “drag” conjure images of attempts at the real, or “passing.” In more contemporary contexts, drag is about highlighting and increasing elements of gender presentation.³ Over the top makeup, extravagant hair pieces, and Photoshop-esque sculpted bodies are often what is thought of when one mentions drag today. However, la loca eschews these definitions. La loca is not interested in passing. Her personhood does not rely on being recognized as the fulfillment idealized forms. Indeed, her personhood is built on *not* being recognized. While those who perform her traffic in idealized versions of the female form, their idealized feminine form is not passable or perfected, but it is just as constructed. La loca is meant to be a spectacle, to look ridiculous.

This dissertation uses la loca to analyze gendered and racialized aspects of la fiesta and follows la loca throughout Puerto Rico to trace her other manifestations. Through her, I investigate the relationship between this socially imagined Black Puerto Rican woman and her gender, race, and religion. I pay particular attention to the way that the term “loca” functions as a means of demarcating acceptable and unacceptable forms of personhood. The appearance of la loca as part of a religious festival is no coincidence, she is a manifestation of the religious

³ See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 2011); and Meredith Heller, *Queering Drag: Redefining the Discourse of Gender-Bending* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

impetus, desire, and tendency toward transgression. Important to note, though, is that her transgression of gender, race, and religion, is built on particular notions of order and disorder, of what belongs and what does not. La loca, in her dress and appearance in la fiesta, ostensibly does not belong. However, order and disorder are tightly managed categories. Indeed, as Mary Douglas makes clear, disorder is an important element of what makes order.⁴ Order and disorder are mutually influencing realms. Therefore, the relationship between la loca's order and disorder is such that there is seemingly no clean division between them. Purposeful and planned disorder, like the performance of la loca, is part of the social fabric that holds together concepts like gender, race, and religion. However, sometimes disorder slips beyond the boundaries and exceeds that which is meant to contain it, that which it is meant to help reify. La loca is one such figure who oversteps boundaries and transgresses and whose transgressions cannot be contained. Therefore, part of what I argue here is that while la fiesta or other institutions might seek to lay claim to la loca, she cannot be controlled. By performing her, though, I argue that Loiceños lay claim to a number of social imaginaries that were once meant to disparage them. This practice, of laying claim to social imaginaries, is what I call "blackening," as the locas do their faces with makeup. Again, part of the character of la loca is the re-darkening of their already dark skin. They blacken themselves, creating disorder from that which was seemingly ordered, namely, their race. Additionally, locas blacken through their disordered appearance, their cross-dressing. Therefore, I extend the practice of blackening one's face to repeat their racialization to the practice of cross-dressing and even their attendance at la fiesta in general. Blackening, then, is the purposeful inclusion of disorder as a method of ongoing critique and ownership of the social

⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

imaginaries and material realities that constitute Black people and their religious practice in Loíza.

What might seem like “non-religious” elements of religious celebration should instead be seen as intimately connected. The madness that la loca injects into the celebration of Santiago is not *outside* of the celebration of him—her performance is integral to that celebration. La loca, who is a mixture of blackness and madness, combines and recombines disparate elements and makes connections where none were thought to exist. Thinking about the connections that la loca makes, I think of her madness in terms of what French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called a “rhizome,” which they used to describe a network-like connection between seemingly heterogenous elements. Famously, they describe the relationship between a wasp and an orchid as co-informing and co-forming the other. They write: “The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid’s reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome.”⁵ In carrying off the pollen of the orchid, they ask, is the wasp not becoming orchid-like? Likewise, is the orchid not becoming like a wasp insofar as it mimics the wasp’s appearance? In this way, la loca is a becoming as she stretches and reaches across gendered and racialized intensities to create links between heterogenous elements.

La loca’s blackening, the doubling down on her own blackness through costume and makeup, further nuances the connection I am making between madness and blackness. As the socially imagined Black Puerto Rican woman, performers of la loca will paint their already dark-skinned faces black with makeup. This leaves her performed blackness to be multiple, redundant,

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Schizophrenia and Capitalism*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10.

and contradictory. More than this, though, in repeating her blackness, she owns and undermines the racialization that would otherwise attempt to marginalize her through racial schemas like colonization and enslavement. Her blackening is what literary critic Mayra Santos Febres calls: “A form of saying which keeps quiet in order to name silence; a way of inserting biography into the midst of other ‘official’ discourses whose version is accepted, and which helps the voice of the excluded to make itself heard.”⁶

Madness, therefore, is integral to what is considered religious. There is no clean separation between that which supposedly belongs and that which is outside of religion.⁷ I argue instead that “religion” can be further understood through gender bending performance and racial imaginaries. Transgression is not simply that which falls outside of religion, but part of what makes up religion. Religion, then, is a movement between transgression and prohibition, between controlled behavior and uninhibited excess.⁸ *La loca* is one way this movement can be traced. Yet she also rebels against this movement and seeks otherwise—that which is different and yet unknown.

La Loca in Previous Scholarship

For the most part, scholarship on *la fiesta* has centered on demonstrating the “Africanness” of the various rituals and customs. This tendency can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century work of Ricardo Alegría’s *La fiesta de Santiago Apóstol en Loíza Aldea*, which

⁶ Mayra Santo Febres, “Caribbean Tranvestism,” in *The Cross-Dressed Caribbean: Writing, Politics, Sexualities* edited by Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Bénédicte Ledent, and Roberto del Valle Alcalá (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 160.

⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁸ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

subsequently became the most influential text for several decades of la fiesta research.⁹ In one sense, this was because Alegría's text was the first ethnographic study of la fiesta. However, in another sense, in Loíza, he held a special place of prominence in Puerto Rico. He was, after all, affectionately called the "father of modern Puerto Rican archaeology."¹⁰ Indeed, it was only because Alegría was in Loíza in 1948, conducting an archeological dig, that he first experienced la fiesta.¹¹ His oeuvre spanned anthropological study of la fiesta and the lives and practices of the Indigenous Taínos. In 1955, one year after the publication of his monograph on la fiesta, he became director of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, a governmental agency responsible for the study and promotion of Puerto Rican history and practice. Held in such high esteem, it was no wonder why during my fieldwork in Loíza, time and again Loiceños would tell me to consult Alegría's text instead of interviewing them. His text, though, is only a modest seventy-seven pages, including index and bibliography. He ambitiously attempted to cover all facets of life, including then-contemporary demographic information, descriptions of novenas performed during la fiesta, and a history of Loíza. In such a short treatise, it is clear why he was unable to critically analyze aspects of la fiesta, such as gender construction and racialization, that merit further inquiry.

When analyzing the festival characters that accompany the images of Santiago, Alegría argued that costuming was one of the ways that men could forget their labor and enjoy

⁹ Ricardo E. Alegría, *La fiesta de Santiago Apóstol en Loíza Aldea* (San Juan: Colección de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1954).

¹⁰ Efrén Arroyo, "5 días de duelo por muerte de Don Ricardo Alegría," *NotiCentro*, July 7, 2011, https://www.wapa.tv/noticias/especiales/5-dias-de-duelo-por-muerte-de-don-ricardo-alegria_20110707091109.html.

¹¹ Ricardo E. Alegría, "Palabras Preliminares," preface to *Las fiestas de Santiago Apostol en Loíza: La cultura afropuertorriquena ante los procesos de hibridacion y globalizacion*, by David Ungerleider Kepler (San Juan: Editorial Isla Negra, 2000), 7.

themselves.¹² It is important to note Alegría's strong emphasis on men. Regarding la loca, Alegría writes: "They are men costumed as women who pretend to be crazy women. These characters organize the city with dustpan and broom, sweeping and cleaning the streets and balconies of the houses, later asking for payment for their 'work.' ... In general, they paint their face black, not usually wearing a mask."¹³ Strikingly, Alegría devotes only a paragraph in his text to consideration of la loca. She does not figure as an important element of la fiesta and is not found anywhere else outside of this paragraph.

These shortcomings, though, have not stopped subsequent scholars from relying on several of his important contributions. Scholars like Edward Zaragoza and David Ungerleider Kepler (who copies, almost word for word, Alegría's summary)¹⁴ build off Alegría and have likewise written about la loca as a marginal character during la fiesta, focusing their respective attention on the processions and the impacts of globalization on la fiesta. It was not until 1995 when Zaragoza published *St. James in the Streets* that there was an English-language study of the festival. In many ways, his text is an updated version of Alegría's; however, one important difference is Zaragoza's ethnographic-theological methodology. Zaragoza is interested in understanding la fiesta as a liturgy and as such, understanding characters like la loca as "ritual clowns." In her raucous behavior, las locas "represent the intrusion of chaos and how life really is: ambiguous, ironic, contradictory."¹⁵ In a liturgical sense, la loca provides levity and relief in the enormously ambiguous event of sacred rite.¹⁶ Writing years later, Zaragoza added clarity to

¹² Alegría, *La fiesta*, 52.

¹³ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 61–2.

¹⁴ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 69; cf. Alegría, *La fiesta*, 61.

¹⁵ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 105.

¹⁶ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 101.

what Alegría meant by “costumed as women” when he wrote: “Some locas were dressed in stylish wigs, fashionable dresses, heels, and handbags slung over one shoulder.”¹⁷ Here we have the basic elements of la loca coming together, her dress, her labor, and her mask. Peter Roberts adds a final element, exaggerated breasts and buttock, and calls these her “defining features.”¹⁸

While the above authors attend to some of la loca’s appearance, Max Harris helps to fill out a fuller picture of la loca through a description of her behavior. A folklorist by training, Harris’s work attempts to fit la fiesta into the larger framework of carnival in general. Carnivals, like la fiesta, are those periods of time of ultimate acceptance and inclusion. Regarding Santiago’s feast days, he argued that they are a period of time when “none, however marginalized by those who dominate human society, be excluded from God’s festivities.”¹⁹ During this period of intense inclusion, even the spurious loca is part of the festivities. La loca, who Harris observed to dress as Alegría, Roberts, and Zaragoza have described her. In Harris’s account, though, she is given new life in her behavior. He writes:

The star of the show was an athletic loca, well over six feet tall, with blackened face, exaggerated pink lipstick, pink head scarf, and long, brown cotton dress, who swept the road with the traditional broom and biscuit tin. At one point, he stopped the bicycle and danced on a small platform over the front wheel, facing backwards and salaciously waving his outrageously padded behind at the crowd in front. When someone jumped onto the platform to attempt mock sodomy, the loca mimed both shock and pleasure. He was a fine actor who played his part with obscene energy and imagination.²⁰

Here we find la loca’s racialized and gendered labor blended with sexual deviance. Harris’s “obscene energy” is the mixture of normally unacceptable behavior enacted during a time of

¹⁷ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 73.

¹⁸ Roberts, Peter, “Distinctive Features of Las Locas—Black Faces, Brooms, Cans, Tips, and Big Behinds.” *Sargasso 2* (2006): 34.

¹⁹ Harris, *Carnival*, 47.

²⁰ Harris, *Carnival*, 46.

inclusion. We begin to see how la loca is not simply a marginal character to la fiesta but instead is an important element that elicits both pleasure and obscenity.

Building off these accounts of la loca, I position her obscene energy as a driving force that pushes the limits and even penetrates boundaries in pursuit of multiplicity, the indescribable, pleasure, and even more madness.

Outline of La Fiesta

The performances that sit at the heart of this dissertation are only one part of a much larger celebration in honor of the Loiceños's chosen patron saint, Santiago. The festivities include *novenas* (ritual prayer cycles), special masses, costuming, music, dance, food, processions, and a street festival. Novenas take place in anticipation of la fiesta each night in the homes of the *mantenadoras* ("keepers" or "guardians" of the images of Santiago). Starting July 15 and lasting nine days, worshippers gather together in front of the image of Santiago and, by memory, will recite the rosary, a series of prayers, and songs to Santiago. As the cycle continues, each image will be venerated at the home of their respective guardian. In total, there are three sacred images of Santiago that are kept in Loíza and receive these special prayers. After the novenas have finished, on the morning of July 24, a herald will go through the streets of Loíza announcing the beginning of the feast of Santiago, which is liturgically celebrated on July 25. Special masses will be said, for example, in dedication of the images of Santiago, before the official festivities begin. The dedication will start at the *árbol del corcho*, the place where the miraculous image of Santiago is said to have appeared *muchos años atras*, as the older residents in Loíza say. Images of Santiago are blessed by the priest from La Parroquia Santiago, and processed into the church. During this dedication Mass, characters such *el caballero* ("the

knight”) and *el vejigante* (a disturbing bat-like creature) accompanied the images of Santiago and were even introduced and described by the priest, Padre Bonilla, at the end of Mass (as seen in Figures 3.1–3.3).

Starting July 26 each image of Santiago is processed through the streets, each of them taking a turn as head of the procession. The image of Santiago de los Hombres is the first Santiago to be processed. Behind him in order are the image of Santiago de las Mujeres and the image of Santiago de los Niños (also called “de los Muchachos” and “Santiagüito”). On July 27, Santiago de las Mujeres will take his turn as head of the procession, with the images of de los Hombres and de los Muchachos behind him. On the final day of the processions, the miraculously appearing image of Santiagüito will take his turn as head of the procession with de los Hombres and de las Mujeres behind. Each of these processions moves from Pueblo to Medianía Alta, from the western seat of Loíza to the small seaside neighborhood to the east. There to accompany the Santiagos as they journey from city center to outskirts are a raucous crowd of residents, tourists, and partygoers dressed as one of several characters, including representatives of Santiago, el caballero, and his mythic enemy, el vejigante. The majority of processors do not costume and will walk, cycle, or even drive behind the images. Cyclists will attach larger speakers to their bikes and play the latest reggaetón hits. Likewise, trucks loaded with small bands with brass instruments, guitars, and conga-like drums. Among these revelers is *la loca*, whose indecent energy pushes the limits of the carnivalesque atmosphere.

Outside of these “official” events related to the Santiago story, there are a range of other events that take place in Loíza during la fiesta. *Comida criolla* will be prepared in the small outdoor kitchen outside La Parroquia Santiago or at Sylvia’s Restaurant, just down the street from La Parroquia Santiago. In Loíza, *comida criolla* includes dishes that started as meals made

from cheap leftovers. They are foods that originally needed to be filled-out with something else to make them more substantial and more plateable. Things like *bacalaíto*, salted and fried cod fritter, were originally something eaten by the poorest in Loíza. Today, however, it is one of the most popular food items on the island and a highly profitable business enterprise.²¹ During processions and street parties, the streets are lined with lawn chairs, canopies, *kioskos* (small popup shops) selling t-shirts and often a combination of comida criolla and beer.

Nightly, at the town square in Pueblo, musicians from all over the country will come to play on the city plaza that is connected to La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio. These open-air concerts go well into the early hours of the morning and attract some of the most popular musical groups in Puerto Rico to Loíza. The musical styles run the gamut of salsa to *bomba*, a genre of music that Loiceños proudly declare originated in Loíza with enslaved Africans who brought their musical practices with them to Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans from all over the island will come to Loíza for a chance to see these artists. Like the raucous procession of the images of Santiago, these concerts extend la fiesta's party atmosphere.

This collection of events, from the procession to the musical performances, is the larger atmosphere in which la loca will appear. What is clear in all of this, from the indecent acts of cross-dressing to the Mass, la fiesta is much bigger than any one singular event. La fiesta, then, is actually a series of events: a collection of images, performances, sounds and affects that imbue the city. La fiesta is a network of mutually influencing performances. The same can be said for la loca: she is a collection of images, performances, and desires. Her dress and behavior indicate that she is the gendered and racialized images of Black femininity in Puerto Rico, whose lewd

²¹ Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra, *Eating Puerto Rico: A History of Food, Culture, and Identity*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 97.

performances transgress the boundaries of acceptable behavior and seemingly have no place in the procession of sacred images of Santiago.

As with any collection, though, *la loca* is affected by people who have performed her. Therefore, the “historical” meaning of *la loca* has faded into the background and Loiceños have made her their own, suffusing her with new and renewed meaning, without concern for historicity, much like the *bacalaíto*. What was the leftovers for the poorest of the poor is now a cherished culinary delicacy in which one takes immense pleasure in eating and cooking. Similarly, *la loca*, the mad Black woman, is the societal leftovers transformed into pleasurable experience.

Santiago’s Miraculous Appearing in Loíza

According to tradition, the celebration that exists today as *la fiesta* began as an act of piety centuries ago by a Loiceño who stumbled upon the statue of Santiago in a neighborhood of Medianía Alta called Las Carreras. From there, things change depending on who you ask. Some say it was an older woman, a *viejecita*, who while bathing in the sea, found Santiago. Some older residents will recount a version of the legend that says the statue appeared on the shore to a local fisherman, who after seeing the statue appear and disappear three times, asked the priest in Pueblo to attend to the miracle.

However, the most widely repeated version of the story says that a man named Atilano Villanueva was working on the farm of Doña Juana Lanzó and José María Villanueva when he found the image. While he was working the land, he found the statue of Santiago de los Muchachos under a cork tree now memorialized as the *árbol de corcho*. In this version of events, Villanueva took the image to the church in Pueblo that night. When he returned the next day to

work, he again found Santiago under the cork tree. Some people's versions of the Villanueva account say that this appearing and disappearing occurred multiple times over multiple days, totaling the three times Santiago moved between Pueblo and Medianía Alta.

In whatever version of events, though, the miraculous image appears and disappears in Medianía Alta to a resident of that barrio. For Loiceños, Santiago's epiphany in Medianía Alta is read as his choosing of them as his favored people. He did not appear to the priest in Pueblo, they say, for example; instead, he chose to appear to "simpler" people at the outskirts of the city. In the more popular legend of his appearing, the Villanueva version, he chooses them multiple times. Almost in defiance of the attempt to be codified in the church, he chooses to be outside of the church, with the people. As a result, Loiceños have greater appreciation for the saint who chose them than they do for their "official" patron saint, San Patricio, whose namesake is the church in Pueblo. In response to Santiago's choosing of the marginalized, Loiceños have chosen him as their patron saint. And in doing so, in choosing their own patron saint, they have blackened the Catholicism they were given or that was forced upon them. They now manage and own that which was meant to harm them. What might seem counterintuitive, accepting the "oppressor's religion," Loiceños instead see as the opportunity to claim something as their own. While San Patricio is the official patron saint of Loíza, Santiago is the one who shapes Loíza: his likeness is on the municipal crest, tourist shops in San Juan carry replicas of him, and the city is awash in a sea of red, his sartorial color. Loiceños belong to Santiago and he belongs to them. Santiago and his constituent parts, the festival characters, the masses, the food, form the people of Loíza. In turn, Loiceños form Santiago in their image, transforming those very things, the characters, the masses, the gastronomy into their collective sense of racial and ethnic community.

The legendary story of the movement between tree and church paved the way for the procession route we see today: his likenesses are taken between Pueblo to Medianía Alta. This route mimics the return element of the Villanueva story, of being taken from Pueblo back to Medianía Alta, from metropole to periphery. Never leaving his favored people, including all those days he is not being celebrated in la fiesta, he stays in the home of one or more of the *mantenadoras*, those who are tasked with keeping the statues throughout the year. There are multiple keepers of the images of Santiago because there are multiple (mad) Santiagos. To the epiphanic image of Santiago (de los Muchachos) were added two additional images: Santiago de las Mujeres and Santiago de los Hombres.

Method I: Ethnography

The majority of Loíza's population is *afrodescendiente*, or African descended. Loíza is one of a handful of cities in Puerto Rico where enslaved Africans were forced to work, first in gold extraction and then in sugarcane cultivation. As such, it is a city with a majority Black population. This term, "afrodescendiente," is not without its problems, as we will see in Chapter Two, though. There is division among Loiceños as to how to understand their Africanity. For some, Africanity is overly determined by negative religious connotations and should be left behind. For others, though, its negative connotations can be overcome through new practices. However, Loiceños agree that their ethnic and racial identities as afrodescendiente Puerto Ricans is an important part of what makes them Loiceño. And it is la fiesta which breaks through the tensions of Africanity in Loíza.

Indeed, it is because of la fiesta that Loíza is known as "Capital of the Tradition." It is a moniker that appears on programs for la fiesta, on official government documents, and on

souvenirs. These efforts coincide with making attempts to salvage Africanity from what can be understood as the “negative sacred,” elements of religious life that bring with them death and illness.²² “Tradition” is taken to refer to what Petra Rivera-Rideau calls “folkloric blackness,” making Loíza the “primary signifier of Puerto Rico’s African heritage.”²³ Which is to say that Loíza is made to embody Puerto Rico’s Africanity, which is seen as distinct from other elements of its ethnic, racial, and religious composition. “Folkloric blackness” is a way of maintaining a distinction between African-inspired practices and the presumed modernity that has left such customs behind.

These distinctions, folkloricness and modernity, can be seen in Loíza’s city design. Loíza is oddly shaped. This is partially due to the city’s limits being drawn and redrawn over time. As a result, the city’s southern limit has two oblong protrusions, giving it a sideways “F” shape. Across the north of the city, hugging the coast, is calle 187. It is the main road in Loíza. It connects the cities of Carolina to the west and Río Grande to the east, spanning nearly 20 km. Heading eastward from San Juan on 187, one is immediately struck by the lush green on either side of the road. As you leave Carolina and enter Loíza, you enter the Torrecilla Baja barrio, the barrio west of Pueblo. The majority of Torrecilla Baja is a nature reserve. However, as you make your way eastward, there is the occasional break in the tropical forest where a kiosko has set up shop. Kiosko de los Dos Palmos is a favorite among Loiceños, some of whom make the special trek west just for their bacalaíto and *alcapurria*, another staple of comida criolla made from fried plantains stuffed with meat and vegetables.

²² Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), 42.

²³ Petra Rivera-Rideau, “From Carolina to Loíza: Race, Place and Puerto Rican Racial Democracy,” *Identities* 20, no. 5 (2013): 621. Important to note that Rivera-Rideau is making a distinction between folkloric blackness and others forms of blackness on the island which are policed and surveilled in ways that folkloric blackness is not.

Crossing the bridge over the Río Grande takes you from Torrecilla Baja to Pueblo, the seat of Loíza. The distance between Pueblo and Medianía Alta is approximately 5 km. This is the distance Atilano Villanueva was said to have trekked when he brought the image of Santiago to the church in Pueblo. This is also the distance the annual procession of images of the Santiagos takes, reenacting and recreating Villanueva's journey. Travelling by car along calle 187 is easy going (aside from potholes, for which Puerto Rico, especially after Hurricane María in 2017, is notorious). In Pueblo, you will find McDonald's, the Post Office, the Municipal Library, and La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio, the city's oldest church. Continuing eastward, heading toward Medianía Alta, newer tent revival-style evangelical churches, with names like "Defenders of the Faith" and "Church of God, Inc.," are dotted along on either side of the 187. Along the way in Medianía Alta is Samuel Lind's art studio, Raúl Ayala's home and museum-shop, the Boy's and Girl's Club, a school, a gas station, and La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol, a newer, cinderblock church complete with ceiling fan and air conditioning.

In many ways, Pueblo and Medianía Alta stand in juxtaposition to one another. One seemingly more "city-like" than the other. One more obviously industrialized than the other. Both, however, bear the scars of "disaster capitalism."²⁴ Buildings were half built and abandoned. Cinderblock buildings missing a fourth wall were ubiquitous. The irony of a sign in Pueblo reading "*Finca Renacer*" ("Farm Rebirth"). Behind it, grey stones collecting dust. Litter, dirt, and debris piled up by the wind against the walls that were constructed. Other buildings were in disrepair and only barely held together. Blue tarps covered homes and businesses. Two years on and Loíza was still reeling from Hurricane María. In some instances, in April 2021, as I finish this dissertation a full four years from the hurricane, the blue tarps remain with no end in

²⁴ Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018).

sight. Naomi Klein theorized these, disaster capitalism and Hurricane María, as two intersecting forces that reinforce each other's disastrous wake.²⁵ While different from each other, they both bare the same scars of these twin disasters. It is impossible to overstate how devastating the impact of Hurricane María was—is—on Puerto Rico. Though María had passed, her wake was still very much left.

The fieldwork component of this research was conducted in July 2019. Though two years on, September 2017 lived on in the everyday lives of Loiceños. Though the hurricane had passed, its effects were still felt throughout the island on a daily basis. From almost daily power outages, food shortages, and tarp “roofs” that leak, life in Loíza was hard for most. This difficulty of life colored my work. It affected who was available and when. For example, in the wake of María, the US Census estimated that over 300,000 people left Puerto Rico (ten percent of the population), with nearly 200,000 of those leaving between September–December 2017.²⁶ It also affected how people interpreted la fiesta. For some, la fiesta in 2018 was about resilience in the wake of disaster—that Puerto Rico would rise again. It would be remiss to not situate la fiesta in terms of the wider social, economic, and affective mood of the island's residents.

This was the setting for my fieldwork in Loíza: a city marred by centuries of enslavement, complex understandings of race, and the coimbricated destructive forces of natural disasters and financial extractivism. In an effort to bring this reality to life through words, I rely heavily on ethnographic theory that argues for an understanding of the work that is produced

²⁵ Yarimar Bonilla and Naomi Klein, “The Trauma Doctrine,” in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, eds. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 22.

²⁶ Jason Schachter and Antonio Bruce, “Revising Methods to Better Reflect the Impact of Disaster,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/estimating-puerto-rico-population-after-hurricane-maria.html>.

after fieldwork (this dissertation, for example) as intimately woven together with fieldwork and not as two separate endeavors.

For more than three decades, “writing culture,” as both a volume and theoretical intervention, has become indispensable parts of ethnographic research and study. However, as time has gone on, *Writing Culture* edited by James Clifford and George Marcus, has not been without its critics. In 2013, nearly thirty years later, a new group of School for Advanced Research participants arrived in Santa Fe, where they continued to think with and about “writing culture.” The Paper Boat Collective, as they called themselves, attempted to go one step further than their predecessors. Clifford et al. saw writing as a product of ethnographic research. The Paper Boat Collective, however, argued that writing was “a generative practice, a tangible presence, part of the stuff of the world it seeks to engage, working with powers and potentialities always present in language, always at work in the world.”²⁷ Writing, then, is not a distinct part of the research process but is integral to the research process. The act of writing was the world-making that anthropologists of an earlier generation were after. This dissertation builds off the Paper Boat Collective, takes ethnographic writing to be akin to both scholarship and art. It is a practice by which I form and inform the world where I conducted my research, in Loíza, Puerto Rico, while at the same time attending to the ways that I was formed and informed by the world around me. In thinking of myself as co-creator and inhabitant of the world I write about, I move to think about the ethnographic as an art form, like storytelling or painting.

In thinking of ethnography as an art, I think of it as similar to portraiture. In writing an ethnography of la loca, I am developing “a portrait of a people” of Loíza. To my mind, the language of portraiture helps the ethnographer in several ways. First, it allows us to position our

²⁷ Paper Boat Collective, “Introduction: Archipelagos, A Voyage in Writing,” in *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, eds. by Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 13.

work as creative non-fiction. The writer is building worlds based on the words and deeds of the people with whom they study. These worlds, however, are a joint effort of style and truth. As such, “writing a portrait” (read: ethnography) allows me to attend to the variegated lives of the people of Loíza insofar as I have to work to build that world around them for you, the reader. Some of this requires artistic license to vividly paint the scene.

Secondly, portraiture allows the work that is produced to be regarded more as an art form, and less as a science. What this means, then, is that different ethnographers can go to the same place and come away with different portraits. All of these differences have to do with the position of the author, the people they are in conversation with, and the author’s commitments—all of which are dependent and contextual. In my case, for example, the aforementioned migration of victims of Hurricane María shaped my research. This work does not hide the fact that it is a portrait and that other portraits exist. When set next to each other, these portraits can help illuminate one another and further illuminate the complex intersections of life in Loíza. Finally, portraiture requires us to pay attention to the moment in which the research is conducted. As communities and people age, so do their perspectives, desires, and attendant commitments. Similarly, a portrait captures a specific moment and the work does not age with the subject. To that end, this work is temporary. As soon as pen goes to paper, the author has captured a fleeting moment. My moment, the moment of researching and writing this dissertation, is one colored by destruction, both natural and unnatural.

In one sense, my fieldwork is shaped by the destructive nature of viral infections that impacted everyone from late December 2019 to the present. Due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, my fieldwork was limited. What was meant to be pre-dissertation fieldwork turned out to be all the fieldwork I could manage ethically and safely. That two-week

pre-dissertation research was designed to make contacts in Loíza, to participate in la fiesta, and to begin to formulate research questions I could ask on two subsequent, extended fieldwork visits. Instead, those two weeks have become the basis of my ethnographic research. In this way, my research is not unlike other “rapid ethnographies” wherein the research is limited because of risks to their health or the health of their participants.²⁸ Despite this setback, I made every effort to make the most of the fieldwork notes, interviews, maps, and drawings. Moreover, I used digital ethnographic methods to remain in contact, where possible, with participants.

In another sense, my fieldwork was shaped by the destruction left by Hurricane María, which was all too evident upon leaving the airport. It was quiet, save for those of us coming in from John F. Kennedy airport. Shops that I would have expected to see open in other airports, Starbucks or a newsstand, were shut. Mónica, my aunt, picked me up from Luis Muñoz Marín airport, named after the first locally-elected governor of Puerto Rico. She’s my mother’s youngest sister and likes to remind others of that in her style and mannerisms. When I arrived late at night on July 15, 2019, Mónica was wearing fashionable sunglasses and a flowing sundress. The sun was long gone but Mónica was dressed for the beach. She offered me a lift and to stay at her apartment in Río Grande, just to the east of Loíza. I stayed with her for a few nights until my accommodation in Loíza was ready. Leaving the airport and entering the near-complete darkness of the highway, it was immediately apparent that Hurricane María still had not passed. It had been just shy of two years since the storm made landfall. “You see?” she said, pointing to the exits with no signage, “they have been gone since María.” “You see?” is a common refrain in Puerto Rico. It refers to nothing aforementioned specifically but assumes that one understands the connection. Often it means something like, “I told you so.” “¿Ves?” she says to me.

²⁸ Cecilia Vindrola-Padros, *Rapid Ethnographies: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 8.

As we traveled further, street lights were missing in some areas, and of those that remained, not all of them worked. Riding in the dark, except for the car's headlights, I was thankful for Mónica's knowledge of the area and her offer of a lift. I would not have been able to navigate the highway on my own. When we arrived in Río Grande, she pointed to the façade of her apartment building. "This wall has been damaged since María," she told me. "And you see that one?" she pointed to the building across from hers, "That one, too." There was an oblong shape, roughly nine by three feet of stucco missing from the opposing building. The missing stucco revealed the cinderblocks underneath. From the car ride to her apartment, it was clear that María had done more than damage buildings and infrastructure; María has damaged the psyche of Puerto Ricans. As a result of Hurricane María and governmental ineptitude, thousands of Puerto Ricans died.²⁹ Mónica and her "since María" comment exemplify the way that people measure time in terms of María. Though María has "passed" in the sense that the winds have died down, the tide has receded, it is true that María is not yet "past," the hurricane is part of everyday life in Puerto Rico; the impact is not yet history, it is present. Some argue, though, that María is only part of the problem. That is, that María only intensified the problems that the island was facing. Before María made landfall, hundreds of schools and businesses were closing, hospitals were shutting and doctors were leaving the island in droves, and buildings and streets were in disrepair.³⁰ María only made things worse, they say; it only exposed what was going on underneath.

²⁹ Like the life of Santiago, the "official" accounts of the dead in the wake of María are multiple and contradictory. There is no universally agreed upon death count. Studies have estimated that anywhere between 3,000 (George Washington University) and 8,000 (Harvard University) Puerto Ricans lost their lives as a result of María or in the wake of the storm. See Kishore et. al, "Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria" *The New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no. 2 (2018): 162–170.

³⁰ Greg Allen, "SOS: Puerto Rico Is Losing Doctors, Leaving Patients Stranded," *NPR News*, March 12, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/03/12/469974138/sos-puerto-rico-is-losing-doctors-leaving-patients->

Months after I left Puerto Rico to return to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, toward the end of December 2019, a series of earthquakes left residents sleeping outside, on their patios for fear of being trapped under their collapsing roof, or worse. This series of quakes re-opened still-hemorrhaging wounds, with some comparing the government's response to the earthquakes to their mishandling of María. While the epicenter was located just off the southern coast, near Guánica, the effects were island-wide. Mónica, for example, in Río Grande, on the northern side of the island, would feel tremors in the middle of the night and would text a WhatsApp group chat I was a part of to check in. From island-wide power outages to the feeling of the ground moving under their feet, everyone could feel the impact no matter where they were. The uncertainty of when the next geological movement would occur left residents anxious.

Whatever the destruction from María and the earthquakes, and now COVID-19, the lasting impact has been an ingrained mistrust of the government and the anxious expectation of the next disaster. Anxiety and mistrust fed into each other. Some residents wondered how many of those thousands who died (or fled the island) could have survived (or remained) had the government responded differently. In January 2020, for example, Ponceños discovered multiple storage facilities filled with undistributed aid that was expiring or already expired. It was not simply that María had destroyed parts of the island, the government willfully allowed subsequent destruction by not distributing the aid it had access to. This was destruction upon destruction.

Sarah Molinari attends to this cycle of disaster by theorizing Hurricane María as one among many.³¹ Meaning, Puerto Rico has experienced many Marías—the many forms of natural

[stranded](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/us/puerto-rico-school-closings.html); and Patricia Menzzei, “Puerto Rico’s Schools Are in Tumult, and Not Just Because of Hurricane Maria” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/us/puerto-rico-school-closings.html>.

³¹ Sarah Molinari, “Authenticating Loss and Contesting Recovery: FEMA and the Politics of Colonial Disaster Management,” in *Aftershocks of Disaster*, eds. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón (Chicago: Haymarket Press, 2019), 286.

and unnatural destruction that María embodied. Long before the earthquakes of December 2019–January 2020, Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón theorized the experience of other Marías in geological terms as an “aftershock,” the subsequent tectonic movement that portends or accompanies the “main shock” of an earthquake.³² Aftershocks can last for days, weeks, even months.³³ This creative use of seismic vocabulary attempts to draw a relationship between disasters. Asking, in effect, which has caused which? Did María cause all of the damage and destruction of 2017 and beyond? Or did María simply reveal the underlying destruction caused by crumbling (or lack thereof) infrastructure and government corruption? They argue that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the “main shock,” or the root cause. Is the main shock disaster capitalism and an unpayable \$74 billion debt that has led to unrealistic austerity? Or is the main shock the hundreds of years of serial colonialism, first by the Spanish and then by the United States? Or are the natural disasters the main shock? Or, against all hope, do these simply point to another shock that is to come? In theorizing the current social and political climate in terms of “aftershocks,” Bonilla and LeBrón have given us a language to think about the multifaceted and complex relationship between all sectors of life. Moreover, that they cannot be separated from each other: they point backwards and forwards at once.

I mention these disasters because they inexorably shaped my fieldwork and I would be remiss to write about la fiesta without writing about the cultural and political landscapes that give shape to the festival. In part, this is because of the way that Loiceños themselves talked

³² Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, “Introduction,” in *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, eds. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 2.

³³ In the case of Puerto Rico, in the last year, they have experienced over a thousand quakes, varying in size and destructiveness. This most recent series, beginning in late December 2019 and carrying over into January 2020, the island has been impacted by over three hundred quakes at 3-magnitudes and approximately ten at 5 or above. See N.J. Van der Elst et al., “Potential Duration of Aftershocks of the 2020 Southwest Puerto Rico Earthquake,” *US Geological Survey*, Open-File Report 2020–1009: 1–5.

about la fiesta in 2018 as a response to Hurricane María—that Puerto Rico would not be defeated. In the direct aftermath of María, a hashtag was born: “#PuertoRicoSeLevanta,” or “Puerto Rico rises.” This hashtag found its way out from the internet and onto the walls of buildings all over Loíza. During the 2018 celebrations of la fiesta, Loiceños read the celebration of la fiesta through this hashtag: they would not be defeated, they said.³⁴ La fiesta is a way of celebrating without needing to find the ultimate answer to the problem of disaster. Related to this is my own theoretical commitment to understanding the relationship between “politics” and “religion.” They are not as separable or cleanly delineated. Indeed, as Talal Asad argued, the attempt to articulate one without the other masks the inner workings of how these two terms co-evolved and their shared history.³⁵ Instead, what I intend to do in this project is to place the religious history of Puerto Rico within the larger history of the island via specific attention to la loca’s presence inside and outside of la fiesta. With la loca, we will wander from the processional crowd and trace her steps along the way.

³⁴ Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi, “In Loiza, the Afro-Boricua Population Won’t Let a Hurricane Wipe Out Their Traditions,” *Remezcla*, August 3, 2018. <https://remezcla.com/features/culture/fiesta-de-santiago-aposto-loiza/>.

³⁵ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 29.



Figure 1.1 Small procession leaving el árbol de corcho in Medianía Alta. Note the “#P.R.SELEVANTA” graffiti on the green and yellow wall.

Method II: Blurring Boundaries

Often times, in ethnography, participation and observation are viewed and theorized as two different tasks the researcher performs. As an observer, one is on the outside, taking notes, seeing what is happening, not personally dealing with the events taking place around them. As a participant, they are tasked with being a part of a ritual act and so they try to remember as much as possible and then later make notes from memory. With street processions and festivals, though, it is easy and normal to participate by observing and to observe while participating.³⁶ One can be part of the processional crowd simply by joining in, walking the route, having a drink, and dancing. There is nothing “major” that is required to participate in that sense. Participating, in this way, allows one to also be observant of what is taking place around them.

³⁶ Krista Thompson argues that part of the event of participating in huge ball events in Jamaica is “being seen.” For Thompson, this means people want to be “seen” so they go to great lengths to create scenarios which guarantee that they will be seen—even renting faux paparazzi to photograph them as they arrive to the event. To see and to be seen is a form of participating, according to Thompson. See Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

For me, this meant I was free to take photos (as many festival goers do) that would extend my ability to observe beyond the moment. Here, my observing, taking photos and reviewing them later, is a form of participation. It is a way of celebrating la fiesta the way that Loiceños did. At the same time, a parade is something meant to be seen. While many participants readied themselves to process with the statue, others set up lawn chairs and small tents on the side of the road—they wanted a good spot to be able to see everything. Participating, in this instance, means observing. The festival atmosphere blurs the boundaries between participant and observer where to observe is to participate and to participate is to observe. It is this festival atmosphere that allows men to become women, Black Puerto Ricans to become white Spaniards, or for outsiders to become insiders.

As a researcher, I occupy these two constructed positions, “insider” and “outsider,” at the same time and in different ways. Though quite familiar with the landscape, geography, and languages of Puerto Rico, familiarity does not an expert make. Nor am I researching “my culture” (whatever that could mean). I lean on what Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús calls the “not quite a native” positionality.³⁷ For her, this language helps to describe her familiarity with Santería while maintaining that she has not “gone native,” a pejorative way of describing forms of ethnographic research wherein the researcher joins the community. Her language helps to describe my own history and familiarity with la fiesta.

My mother was born and raised in Puerto Rico. Half of her brothers and sisters have lived there their whole lives. I would spend summers, holidays, and smaller portions of time with them in Bayamón, Corozal, Mayagüez, Ponce, and San Juan. With family, like Mónica, who has lived for years in Río Grande, it was not uncommon for me to visit Loíza. As we would pass through, I

³⁷ Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 25.

distinctly remember hushed conversations about witches, *santeras* (always gendered feminine), and the “demonic.” As a child, I could never really understand *what* was demonic but simply knew something was different about Loíza.

In this work, I do not pretend to offer objective truth about la loca. My work is influenced by my relationship to the island of Puerto Rico, my family, and the people with whom I worked. In knowing, naming, and confronting my own social location and biases, I can more critically analyze those commitments and their influence on my work instead of eliding the question in a futile attempt at objectivity. That is to say, Beliso-De Jesús’s “not quite a native” formulation is a helpful reminder about the position of the investigator who might be familiar with the world of the community they are researching but who is not “native” to it, not born into it, not a part of its day-to-day life. This distinction between “knowledge of” and “native to” is a position many anthropologists take up in their work.

While knowledge of the area, language, and the customs might be helpful, there is nothing that can turn me into a Loiceño. Indeed, I am indelibly marked in a community like Loíza. I am a white Puerto Rican in a Black Puerto Rican community. My Spanish, rough around the edges from years of living in an English-dominant environment, moves slowly over syllables that Puerto Ricans will often skip past. I do not pretend that this my community. However, festivals, rife with their playful transgressions and transgressive playfulness, are an interesting place to think about the boundaries between supposed differences. In the processional crowd, the distinction between insider and outsider is lost in the chaos of drink, dance, and laughter. This dissertation is interested in the way that la loca oversteps certain boundaries, ignores others altogether, and seeks pleasure. I take la loca as my cue to blur boundaries, methods, and conversation partners.

In the spirit of blurring boundaries, I want to consider the role of my participants in my research. Traditionally, the ethnographer is considered an archivist of oral traditions.³⁸ In thinking about the communities where research is conducted and the people who live in those communities as documents in an archive, Clifford James positions the researcher as the tool that gathers everything together. Against this, I seek to empower my participants as active narrators and historians in their own right. Here, we work more in unison as an artist and their paints do in creating a portrait. Indeed, as Jessica Johnson notes, the ethnographer is the tool of the community rather than authority.³⁹ This means that I position myself as the paint brush, the tool, of the Loiceños I met and lived with. The story that I tell is the story given to me by them. In that sense, then, the story that I tell, while limited in both time and scope, is focused on the things my participants emphasized, repeated, and made sure I was aware of. I write what they say and note, as best as possible, tone and inflection.

Secondly, in theorizing my participants as co-creators of this document, I mean to acknowledge them and their labor. That is to say, they sat with me, often for hours, and opened their world to me. Not only does this require labor in the sense of having the time to take off work to do this, but also emotional labor. I acknowledge the long history of extractivist ethnography, where a supposed expert comes from the North Atlantic to conduct research *on* a community in the Global South and take that story back to North Atlantic communities for consumption. Against this kind of scholarship, I treat my participants experts in their own right, as “organic intellectuals” who have knowledge all their own based on their lives and

³⁸ James Clifford, “Impartial Truths,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986), 17.

³⁹ Jessica Johnson, *Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll’s Evangelical Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 6.

experiences.⁴⁰ The title “expert” is a little tricky, though, and admittedly does not resolve all of the tensions mentioned before. In calling them experts, I do not wish to convey that all of my participants are public figures who wish to be contacted with questions regarding la loca. Indeed, in most cases throughout this dissertation, I have chosen to change the names of my participants. This was my decision to help protect their identities. In some cases, I have not changed the identity of the expert in question because the specific person is a public figure. In all cases, I make every effort to properly reflect their voice in these pages.

Theory I: “Blackened” Atlantic

As I briefly sketched above, the history of colonization and natural disaster have affected the way that Puerto Ricans understand themselves. Important for this dissertation is the way that this history has contributed to Puerto Rican understandings of gender and race and how those two are reified in a religious procession like la fiesta and, specifically, in la loca. To claim, however, that they are simply inheritors of colonial visions of gender and race would miss the point. As I have described above, Puerto Ricans take up these colonial narratives, invest meaning into them, and reinvent them for their own purposes, what I have referred to as “blackening.” Thus, my interest in la loca is as an articulation of Puerto Rican ambivalence. Ambivalent here meaning to have a dual meaning as opposed to passive acceptance. That is, how la loca takes up these colonial pasts and reinvents them such that they attempt to escape that colonial past. La loca performs absurd work, in an absurd outfit, in an absurd context (a celebration of Santiago).

⁴⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publisher, 1971), 6. While I find Gramsci’s term helpful for reframing the “intellectual,” the term “organic intellectual” still reifies some of underlying distinctions made by those who think laborers are not “intellectuals.” It is meant to “raise up” the laborer from worker to the role of culture producer. However, that the worker needs to be “raised up” from their position as worker to “intellectual” still creates “intellectual” as a higher level of social stratification and the worker as lower. It reinforces the binary that it was attempting to undermine.

Her absurdity, though, is political and social commentary. As I will discuss below, her madness is a way of displaying and critiquing the centuries of violence that created the image of Black women and her labor as mad. Taking on these images and performances, *la loca* mocks them. However, she still traffics in their meanings while simultaneously creating new meanings for them.

“Blackened Atlantic” is neologism that I employ in an attempt to combine the fields of Black Atlantic studies, Black studies, and gender studies as the theoretical component of this dissertation. In short, it is an attempt to combine the theoretical work of theorists like Frantz Fanon, Paul Gilroy, Hortense Spillers, and Sylvia Wynter as vital conversation partners in Black Atlantic studies. I connect Gilroy’s idea of network-like connections between continents and Fanon’s idea of racialization to write this project. At the same time, I turn to Hortense Spillers to attend to the various ways that racialization always already entailed idealized forms of gender expression, for example. Ultimately, I am concerned with applying contemporary Black studies to Puerto Rico. Though solidly part of the Caribbean, its connection to the United States via annexation after the Spanish-Cuban-American war has left the island as “*ni de aquí, ni de allá*,” neither here, nor there. Or, according to a US Supreme Court ruling, “foreign in a domestic sense.”⁴¹ As a territory of the United States, Puerto Rico has no federal voting rights even though its residents are US citizens; unlike the US, Puerto Rico has two official languages: English and Spanish; further, it cannot create new partnerships with other Caribbean islands because of US-imposed sanctions and thus it is left to trade and partner with the US almost exclusively. This has

⁴¹ This phrase first appeared in the Supreme Court case, *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901). The case centered on whether or not US territories, like Puerto Rico, were subject to the US Constitution. In his opinion, Justice Edward White stated that these territories were “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense” since annexation had not been incorporated into the United States. See Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, “Between Foreign and Domestic,” in *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*, eds. Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

left Puerto Rico in a liminal, co-dependent state. This liminality, I argue, is one of the reasons why “Black Atlantic studies” has forgotten Puerto Rico.⁴² This dissertation seeks to place Puerto Rico within that theoretical framework by bringing together the aforementioned Black Atlantic theorists to bear on *la loca*.

The language of “blackening” is something I draw out from Beliso-De Jesús’s reading of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. In *Black Skin, Whites Masks*, Fanon recounts the time when he was on a train and a child *made* him Black. “Look, a Negro! *Maman*, a Negro!” blurted out a young boy as he ran to his mother’s arms. The boy’s mother responded: “Ssh! You’ll make him angry.”⁴³ Quiet, you will make him *mad*, she said. Recounting that moment, Fanon argues that his body and his being were not solely his. Instead, in being called a “Negro”⁴⁴ and in simultaneously enlisting his mother, the boy returned Fanon’s body to him, “spread-eagle, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day.”⁴⁵ Fanon’s racialization in this moment is something that is done to him. That is, it is not of his own making. Beliso-De Jesús calls this “blackening.”⁴⁶ Blackening, then, is the action by which one is made to be abject.

⁴² Such an omission is not surprising when the public face of *puertorriqueñidad* is celebrities like Bad Bunny, Jennifer Lopez, or Ricky Martin. More fundamental than this, though, is that blackness in Puerto Rico is tightly managed and only certain forms are deemed acceptable. See Isar Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Culture, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁴³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 93, italics original.

⁴⁴ Throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon uses the n-word to describe his nonbeing. While I cannot reproduce that language here, I am prompted to note its use as a more aggressive way that Fanon and other Black people have been *given* a body that is foreign to them.

⁴⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 93.

⁴⁶ Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería*, 30.

Fanon writes: “The Negro is animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly.”⁴⁷ And I add to Fanon, the “Negro” is mad.

Important to note in this passage from Fanon is that being made Black is not an individual process. Being made Black is a social effort that enlists others and demands that they recognize the pronouncement of blackness made. “Look, a Negro! *Maman*, a Negro!” shouted the child. The boy hails his mother. It is not enough to be made Black, as above; blackening requires that those around acknowledge the truth of the situation, the truth of the scariness of blackness. “Look” functions as ways of drawing attention to the declaration. The boy not only interpellated Fanon, but he similarly hailed his mother—she is called to acknowledge the reality of blackness. The child did not stop, however. He continued, “*Maman*, look, a Negro; I’m scared!”⁴⁸ The child asks the mother not only to identify Fanon as a Negro, but also to acknowledge his fear. Being Black and blackening are not simple processes of nuance and complexity. We must also attend to the violent history that makes it so that “Black” and “to be blackened” become frightening and how those histories might be engaged in meaningful ways. To be sure, they are violent but they are not the finality. Indeed, blackening produces as much as it inhibits (Chapter Two).

Alongside this negative definition of “to blacken,” I consider how blackening might be a productive practice of ownership and reclamation, not destruction. In this instance, I draw “blackening” from the practice of locas, who paint their already Black faces with black makeup. In Fanon, we saw that “blackening” refers to a process of change as destructive—that what was previously there is now damaged, spread-eagle, disjointed. In la loca, though, blackening is the

⁴⁷ Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 93.

⁴⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

practice of repeating *ad absurdum* that which is already known. Locas paint their already Black faces black, creating unnecessary and illogical redundancy; she doubles down on her own blackness through an exaggerated form of it. Furthermore, the process of blackening allows what was once destructive to be remade into something that one can use as a point of pride or celebration. Here, la loca's blackening is part and parcel to la fiesta, which is considered an important celebration of Africanity and blackness in Puerto Rico.⁴⁹ Her blackening, therefore, is part of a celebration of African identity and culture while at the same time meant as a critique of the process that created her (the Fanonian blackening). Indeed, the point of blackening is taking that which was meant for harm and turning it into good even as she performs the historical injury of her creation.⁵⁰ She does not avoid historical injury, though. She bears it in multiple ways. She is a complex network of connections and mutually reinforcing tendencies.

For Paul Gilroy, the place to look for a way to understand the complex relationship between what I have described as different forms of blackening, was the Atlantic. Specifically, he was interested in the development of "race" vis-à-vis "nation." Gilroy argued that blackness and Britishness have been understood to be mutually exclusive categories such that being Black prohibited one from being British, or vice versa. He writes: "This has become the dominant view where black history and culture are perceived, like black settlers themselves, as an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, prior to their arrival, was stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated."⁵¹ Against this, Gilroy offers up the Atlantic as the place of crossing and mixture. He writes: "I want to develop the suggestion that cultural

⁴⁹ Samiri Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 48.

⁵⁰ Mayra Santos Febres, "Caribbean Transvestism," 161.

⁵¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 8.

historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.”⁵² From this, “the Black Atlantic” was born. The Black Atlantic posits an intimate connection between Africa, Europe, and the Americas noting that their interconnectedness makes it impossible to think about a “pure” cultural form. He writes: “the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.”⁵³ Through the forced movement of enslaved Africans to other parts of the world, blackness became a globalizable phenomenon—blackness could no longer be something located in one continent. The waters of the Atlantic act like an impossibly large cable connection between the four continents and demonstrates their connectedness but also their inability to be separated—they are entangled and form a messy and dense assemblage.

To Gilroy, I add the aforementioned Fanonian theory of racialization; I see them as important conversation partners in the discussion of race and racialization. Moreover, through them, and others, I intentionally bring together Black studies and Black Atlantic studies to bear on *la loca*. Fanon complements Gilroy’s theorization of the Black Atlantic by attending to the violent formation of racial others. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon theorizes the relationship between language and being with particular attention to race in the formulation of one’s personhood. Being verbally abused and made into a monster (“Look, it’s a Negro!”) because he was Black, he was cast into a realm of “nonbeing.” That is, “less than” in a dialectical sense. Fanon writes: “a Black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and

⁵² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15.

⁵³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19.

arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge.”⁵⁴ Not only are Black people not *given* the possibility of subjectivity, Fanon writes, they are likewise not able to gain enough traction to do anything about it. As such, Black people remain in this “zone of nonbeing.” Important to note here is Fanon’s masculinist language. Throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes the zone of nonbeing in relationship to Black men, specifically. This is not an accident given Fanon’s understanding of the possibility of subjectivity as rooted in “Man.” That is to say, white men are the arbiters of subjectivity for Fanon. Thus, Fanon uses “Man” as the quintessence of subjectivity.⁵⁵

Augmenting Fanon’s nonbeing, Hortense Spillers argues that all Black people were “ungendered” through enslavement.⁵⁶ That is to say, through the commodification of enslaved peoples, the enslaved had their total humanness removed from them, including their respective genders. The Fanonian “Man” still orders subjectivity and personhood; however, it is not simply Black men who are left without possibility. Indeed, it is all Black people who have been removed from the realm of personhood. This is because for enslavers, one’s economic valuation superseded all else, including one’s gender. Spillers writes, “Under these conditions, one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into ‘account’ as *quantities*.”⁵⁷ Commodification led to a separation of the human person from their materiality. Enslaved peoples were not people with bodies, they were flesh, “that zero degree of social

⁵⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.

⁵⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xi–xvii passim. Note: this capitalization of “Man” is original to the French text. See Frantz Fanon, *Peau noir, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952).

⁵⁶ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 68.

⁵⁷ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 72.

conceptualization.”⁵⁸ “Flesh” is the primordial, prediscursive ground upon which no socialization has occurred; it has not been theorized and, therefore, does not deserve second thought. Such “flesh” can be treated however the “owner” desires because it does not come with a body, a subjectivity. Spillers takes the Fanonian zone of nonbeing one step further to think about how the process of enslavement and racialization further construed gender as a racialized category and vice-versa. In her theorization, race was part and parcel of what made one’s gender, or lack thereof.

What is the possibility for Black people, then? In this space of nonbeing, which I have defined as both lack of subjectivity and proper gender, what does la loca’s blackness and her blackening do? Sylvia Wynter’s concept of the “demonic” helps to answer this question.⁵⁹ For Wynter, the demonic is a realm that is full of possibilities and potentialities that are not related to “Man.” Wynter sidesteps the question of subjectivity altogether and offers ways of thinking about personhood outside of subjectivity, which is beholden to “Man.” To strive after subjectivity is to reenter the zone of nonbeing. Instead, the demonic allows for Black people to theorize modes of being in the world that are not in relation to “Man.” La loca, the madwoman at the center of this dissertation, does just that: she sidesteps questions of proper subjectivity and instead offers a mad form of being that does not attempt to respond to Man’s accusation. As we shall see, this mode of being requires extreme bravery as Men will inevitably question one’s ability to be in the world without relation to Man.

⁵⁸ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

⁵⁹ Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman,’” in *Out of Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, 355–372 (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990).

I take these theorists, Gilroy, Fanon, Spillers, and Wynter and their respective theorizations of the Black Atlantic, zone of nonbeing, ungendering, and the demonic as the matrix wherein the *la loca* is found. She is an assemblage of articulations of blackness and femininity in Puerto Rico that carries the lineages of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and gender hierarchy. However, given that she is an articulation, Loiceños (among other Puerto Ricans) have taken her as the opportunity to rearticulate blackness and femininity. *La loca* seeks to display the colonial scars, enslavement and racism, among others, *and* engage colonial powers in the violent history that has brought about these scars. “Blackened Atlantic,” then, refers to the racialized and gendered ideologies that go into and went into the making of the “zone of non-being” and “ungendering” and the method by which people lay claim and reinvest those same injuries with new meaning. As participants have argued, the raced and gendered social position they are told to occupy can be transformed into a source of ethnic and cultural pride. Therefore, along with many of my participants, for whom *la fiesta* and its attendant characters are important cultural and ethnic expressions, I acknowledge the violent history of racialized and gendered ideologies in subject formation. “Blackened,” therefore, provides a framework for understanding the complex and multilayered way subjects present themselves as part of a long history and assemblage and the ways that that history can be remade.

Theory II: Madness

Since the annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898, the English language slowly made its way into Puerto Rican life. Indeed, English is now taught in schools and younger generations of Puerto Ricans are completely fluent in both languages.⁶⁰ Though, Spanish is still the default

⁶⁰ Sam Erman, *Almost Citizens: Puerto Rico, the U.S. Constitution, and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

language on the island. For older generations, in particular, the adoption of English has been harder. Thus, for these older Puerto Ricans, the extent of their English is loan words that have found their way into the Spanish-dominant culture. “Super,” “wow,” and “extra” are just some of the English words that many Puerto Ricans sprinkle into their conversations. For younger generations, the acquisition has been easier and facilitated by the internet and media services that provide English language programming, such as Netflix and DirecTV. For them, they move effortlessly between the two languages. Occasionally, though, English and Spanish will collide as they reach for words and phrases in one language only to find it in the other. They slip up, force English where Spanish is, and vice-versa. They move between the two languages, forcing them together, breaking language conventions, and invent new forms. In this dissertation, I do the same with “madness.” I theorize madness at multiple registers, floating between Spanish and English. Like my participants, I stretch the limits of language to think about new ways of joining different meanings together.

In English, for example, “mad” is colloquially synonymous with anger. One might describe themselves as being “mad at” someone and mean they are angry with them. Madness, in one sense, then is understood as rage and anger. In another sense, “mad” can refer to an abundance or excess. For example, “it was mad cold outside,” some in the northeastern part of the US might say when the temperatures dip below 30°F. “Mad” in this case refers to *excessively* cold weather. Or, Kendrick Lamar describes the excessive violence of his neighborhood in Compton, California, a “m.A.A.d” city.⁶¹ Compton, a city suffering from poverty, lack of opportunities, histories of police violence, and governmental negligence is not that different than

⁶¹ Kendrick Lamar, “m.A.A.d city.” Track #8 on *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Top Dawg Entertainment, compact disc, 2012.

Loíza, actually.⁶² Finally, “mad” can also refer to the “insane,” which although slightly anachronic, is still perfectly understood in colloquial English usage to refer to those who are considered mentally unwell. These are meanings and uses of “mad” that I trace here in this dissertation.

At the same time, “loca” and “*locura*” (“madness”) have their own registers in Puerto Rico. In a very literal sense, “loca” means “madwoman”—as in, crazy woman. This is not unlike its English language usage above. It describes one’s mental health or state. However, “loca” has other meanings. When pejoratively used it “refers to feminine men who are typically assumed to desire other men.”⁶³ Notice the use of the grammatical feminine ending (“loca” as opposed to “loco”) to describe men who are presumed to be effeminate. There is a slippage between one’s gender and one’s sexuality wherein one’s assumed sexuality is determinant of one’s gender and vice versa. In this sense, gender and sexuality are inextricably connected in these moments of pejorative denunciation. Moreover, notice the combination of misgendering and the application of mental illness to describe another’s gender-sexuality. “Loca,” then, is a way of collapsing gender and sexual non-conformity, and mental illness into one character. The result being that one’s mental illness is the reason for their non-conformity. Thus, as Melissa González notes: “loca reflects parallels in the biopolitical management of both craziness and homosexuality, two subjectivities that have been historically relegated to a position of otherness.”⁶⁴ An example of this biopolitical management is when someone is getting too emotional, especially men, other

⁶² See Samiri Hernández Hiraldo, ““If God were Black and From Loíza”: Managing Identities in a Puerto Rican Seaside Town.” *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 66–82; and Samiri Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

⁶³ Rosamond S. King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 46.

⁶⁴ Melissa M. González, “La Loca,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 123. This biopolitical management is further analyzed in Chapter Four.

men will castigate him saying: “*No te pongas tan loca,*” or stop being so crazy. Where being emotional is read as effeminate *and* as mental illness. This is similar to in English when someone is accused of being “hysterical.” The accused has become “too emotional” to be reasonable. Such accusation immediately feminizes the accused because their flood of emotion is ascribed to them as a result of menstruation and reproductive organs.⁶⁵

Moving between and around these multiple forms of madness, I theorize madness in multiple ways in this dissertation. Like my research participants, I move between the Spanish and English uses and meanings of madness throughout. Often times, these definitions and usages overlap; however, at other times, they collide and move away from each other. Madness, then, is a method of drawing things into relationship through use. I use *la loca*, the mad black-Black woman, to analyze and enliven these various forms of madness throughout.

It is not a coincidence that *la loca* is a Black woman or that a Black woman is called “*la loca*.” Blackness is connected to madness and madness to blackness. Indeed, as I stated earlier in this Introduction, madness and blackness are mutually enforcing nodes of subjectification or de-subjectification—and, as I will argue, modes of being that leave behind subjectivity altogether. Therefore, in this dissertation, I slip between these two modes: blackness and madness. “Ssh!” says the mother to her child, “you’ll make him angry.”⁶⁶ To be Black is to be mad. I draw from Therí Alyce Pickens and her formulation of madness in English, as excessive. She writes: “Mad carries a lexical range that includes (in)sanity, cognitive disability, anger, and, for anyone who remembers the slang of the 1990s, excess (usually synonymous with too or really).”⁶⁷ She, too,

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988), 145.

⁶⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 93.

⁶⁷ Pickens, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, 4.

mixes these meanings: anger and excess. Though she mobilizes her analogy to analyze science fiction, I extend her reading of the relationship between blackness and madness to *la loca*. Specifically, I used her framework to theorize *la loca* as not simply a subject to be researched but as method of inquiry. This means that my dissertation is not only a work about *la loca* but is also shaped by her, by her excessiveness, her ineffability, her playfulness, and her monstrosity. As such, this dissertation slips between performance of her and investigation of her. Often, she reveals herself explicitly in the pages that follow. At other times, she is the fuel that moves the engine of research. In either case, *la loca* and her madness defies easy categorization. Sometimes you cannot theorize and can only experience. I have tried to reproduce some of those experiences here.

Reproducing those experiences also means finding a way to write about the experience of madness without reducing it to a psycho-medicalization. That is, without drawing a clear line of distinction between myself and the world of *la loca* such that *she* is *loca* and I am not. In this sense, this dissertation at times slips into the performance of madness. That is, I embrace what madness I can in a format like a dissertation for an academic degree. In some other cases, I talk back to myself (and you) through the use of parenthetical asides. Like Michael Taussig did as he drove past something he could not quite comprehend: “I saw a man and a woman. At least I think she was a woman and he was a man. And she was sewing the man into a white nylon bag.”⁶⁸ Taussig wrote of a fleeting experience and of people he did not know. Later, as he continued to think about this couple, he wrote: “Like a movie, I flow onward in the stream of life that pours into the tunnel. But the woman (is she a woman?) is still, her neck bent over. The man

⁶⁸ Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in My Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1.

(is he a man?) is enclosed already.”⁶⁹ Taussig hastily drew them and made commentary in fieldwork notebook. They were still and enclosed in his drawing. However, their lives continue long after Taussig passed them in his car and cemented their lives in his notebook. Similarly, I use asides to talk to myself and to you, the reader. These asides break the “fourth wall” of the dissertation and perform an internal conversation I had with myself while writing. They are also an invitation to you to think about the flow juxtaposition between the flow of life Taussig wrote about and the stillness of the dissertation.

Outline of Dissertation

Each chapter of this dissertation theorizes madness vis-à-vis la loca at a different but related register. Specifically, I trace madness via la loca in excess, the nonlogical, pleasure, and monstrosity. Note, though, that la loca is not always the central figure of analysis. Instead, she often appears as a guide and a theoretical orientation to madness. As such, la loca and her locura are not confined to la fiesta. Indeed, I explore the various ways that la loca exceeds the boundaries of la fiesta and how la loca appears in different settings. In Chapters One and Two, she is more centrally tied to la fiesta. In Chapters Three and Four, however, I examine the wider uses of “loca” to think what about is wrapped up her appearances during la fiesta. In each of these cases, I am interested in following la loca, sketching her, and tracing her as she appears and disappears in and around Loíza. What I have expressed here in this dissertation is a mobile theory of la loca.

Chapter One, “Mad, Black History,” covers the multiple and contradictory histories of la fiesta. In this chapter, my interest in la loca is her multiplicity and the superfluous forms she

⁶⁹ Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This*, 9.

takes. To do this, I use the multiple origin stories that surround la fiesta. However, I am not reading the present characters, like la loca, backwards through history trying to find her supposed “true origins.” Against the search for a point of origin, this chapter showcases the “knot of history.” As at least four competing histories of la fiesta circulate in Loíza and beyond, it is impossible to find the “real” history of the festival. Instead, Loiceños accept, sometimes begrudgingly, the multiple, excessive histories of la fiesta. In this regard, then, la loca functions as the theoretical approach to history. She does not allow for simple origins. Instead, she points to the excessive ways that histories are produced and the mechanisms by which they are produced. In the case of la fiesta and la loca, history is produced and reproduced through colonial expansion and enslavement of Africans. Madness in Chapter One, then, is traced as historical and narrative excess. Through the competing histories of the origins of Santiago and la fiesta, I theorize la loca as method and theory for understanding both Santiago and la fiesta. Thus, this chapter is concerned with how Loiceños use, create, and re-create links to the past through narrative.

In Chapter One, we are more fully introduced to la loca, who narrates the multiple histories of la fiesta. However, in pointing us to this excessive notion of history, la loca also demonstrates that some forms do not make sense. “Mad” in this chapter refers to the ways that some forms of being and speech do not align with prescribed social norms and are thus read as inane. By attending to the history of enslavement in Puerto Rico, Chapter Two, “1510: One or Several Africas?” more fully attends to the ways la loca evades neat capture in the dialectical movement between Subject and object. I theorize three versions of Africanity: negative, affirmative, and mad. For some Loiceños, Africanity is negatively charged inasmuch as it refers to religious practices. For others, however, Africanity is an ethnic and cultural marker that needs

to be preserved, cherished, and nurtured. These two forms of Africanity, I argue, are caught up in a dialectic, though. Each of them responds in one way or another to the history of enslavement, either negatively or affirmatively. La loca, however, presents another way of being in the world that does not respond to the dialectic. She evades the question of subjectivity altogether. Instead, she is “demonic.” Here I build off Wynter’s aforementioned theory of the demonic in order to argue that la loca, instead of replying to the dialectic, is a manifestation that does not have a discernable language. As such, la loca and her speech sounds like babble. The demonic is nonsense, nonlogical, inane—or, at least that is what (colonial) logic would conclude. La loca, as nonsense, is a demonic figure. That is, she is a vision and version of Africanity that is ineffable. When you see her at la fiesta, she does not coincide with the history and narrative of la fiesta and yet she is there, having a good time, sweeping, begging, dancing, flirting, and drinking.

Chapter Three, “La Loca: Play and Protest,” theorizes la loca as pleasure and play. In this chapter, I am concerned with her madness as a form of expression that does not calculate cost or attempt to discern outcomes. Instead, la loca’s locura is a method of pleasure-seeking. I draw from the work of Saidiya Hartman and Tavia Nyong’o and Jack Halberstam to position locura as form of anarchism. Building off the important work of Hartman and Nyong’o and Halberstam, I theorize anarchism as a political philosophy and the associated set of actions that are characterized as antithetical to being a part of “civil society.” This is itself predicated upon notions of subjectivity that by definition exclude Black people. As such, la loca turns her attention to seeking joy and pleasure in an “anti-locas” world. Locas, however, do not seek to amend anti-locas systems. Instead, they find joy and pleasure when and however they can. In drawing out this relationship, I theorize “la loca” as a figure who blurs the line between decency and indecency through pleasure-seeking and play. Her protest, though, is twinning of means and

ends. La loca's behavior is a mixture of seeking out "otherwise" and living "otherwise." That is, pleasure and play as a means to its own end.

Not everyone enjoys play, though. There are those who see play as useless or frivolous and would rather others did not play. Chapter Four, "Mad, Black Atlantic," traces such a disposition. In this final chapter, I trace la loca's locura as trans*. To be trans* is to be mad. Using the life and death of a loca, Alexa Negrón Luciano, I track the various ways that "loca" and "locura" get deployed in Puerto Rico as a means of revealing "the truth." "Deployment" used with all of its violent and militaristic connotations. Specifically, how "loca" gets used to classify gender non-conforming people and queer people. Alexa, who is ridiculed and denounced as a loca, points us to the various ways that mad-trans* people are constantly hailed to align and realign with gender normativity. Drawing on the work of Susan Stryker and her theorization of transness as monstrosity, I draw a link between Frankenstein's monster and la loca. Monsters reveal and announce. Like Nietzsche's madman, la loca announces the death of God—the end of the "real." Trans*ness announce the end of the Subject and announces new possibilities. Returning to Gilroy and Glissant, I move to think about how la loca's disruption of the real might further disrupt what we have come to know as "Black Atlantic" studies. Building off the work of Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's work on the "queer Atlantic" and Christine Sharpe's work on the "Trans*Atlantic," I offer the "Mad Atlantic" as a way of combining trans* studies and Black Atlantic studies via la loca. The mad Atlantic is a way of attending to the attempts to contain locas through violence, the multiple movements crisscrossing the Atlantic, and the constantly shifting nature of the waters of the Atlantic.

As the constantly shifting figure at the center of this dissertation, la loca does not allow easy conclusions. In some instances, as I have sketched above, she avoids them altogether. The

Conclusion, therefore, gathers together these traces of la loca and her madness as open-ended notions of possibility and potential. The conclusion is less a close to the narrative arc of this dissertation (as if there could be neat conclusions to madness) than it is the elaboration of still other possibilities that are to be traced. As such, it brings the previous chapters into relief as part of a bigger constellation that is la loca. It is an invitation to think about la loca, her multiple meanings, and what possibilities remain.

CHAPTER 1: MAD, BLACK HISTORY

The Sea is history.
—Derek Walcott⁷⁰

A new contradiction now comes to light. Histories of peoples colonized by the West have never since been uniform.
—Édouard Glissant⁷¹

Narrating History

In Puerto Rico, history is multiple and time folds in on itself. Time and again during my fieldwork in Loíza, I would hear people say: “*¡Mira la hora!*” or “*¡Tengo que ir ahora!*” Like the White Rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, people would glance at their watches only to find that they are *already* late. That word, “ahora,” does a lot of work. Even though they recognize they are late, they do not actually leave *immediately*. They sit for a bit longer to finish a story or finish hearing a story, perhaps. In that moment of realization, the story helps to momentarily suspend time. Now, “ahora,” is put on hold.

Adults finish their drinks, which have been filled and refilled multiple times by now, enthralled in one story or another. (“Ahoras” can last hours if drinks are involved.) Children know this all too well and make their beds at the bottom of stairs as they wait to leave, on couches watching TV, or in backseats of cars as drivers idle in driveways. Children know not to move until mom has found her purse, has the keys out, and moves to the door. However, even

⁷⁰ Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History,” in *Derek Walcott: Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 364.

⁷¹ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 92.

then, out the door, in the driveway, engine running, *ahora* carries on. Like the White Rabbit, despite their tardiness, they stay for a spell.

There is a bit of a contradiction in the realization that one is late. One does not rush off immediately (it would be impolite to do so); instead, one begins the slow movements of saying “goodbye.” In Puerto Rico “goodbye” is like a story in that it comes in stereotypical movements of rising action and resolution. One gets up to begin to say goodbye and is met with a disapproving “¿*Y a dónde tu vas?*” And where are you going? they say. Then come the excuses: work in the morning, my partner will wonder where I am, or I am tired. Eventually, after a good enough excuse is found, they are permitted to leave—but not without saying goodbye to everyone. There is not just one goodbye. You tell each person you are leaving, and perhaps you will stay *ahora*. “Goodbye,” the traditional end to a conversation, is really the beginning of myriad others. “Goodbye” is not something said once but said multiple times—and if you are not careful, sometimes even to the same person. “Goodbye” is not announced to the room, it is said intimately to individuals. As one moves about the room telling each person “goodbye” what is traditionally understood as a punctiliar moment gets extended. “Goodbyes” can sometimes last more than an hour. Goodbyes, like *ahoras*, can be further extended with “last drinks,” such as shots of *pitorro*, a “moonshine rum” popular in Puerto Rico.

These situations, the realization that one is late and the goodbye, showcased the way that people in Puerto Rico use narratives to manage time and history. By telling and re-telling histories through anecdotal stories, people are able to indefinitely hold onto a moment. This is the “*ahora* moment.” On the other hand, the “goodbye moment,” illustrates the way that punctiliar time gets multiplied, often in excessive ways. With each “goodbye,” the story changes

ever so slightly. Small details get elaborated or missed entirely. As such, the Story, capital S, changes. Or, better, there never was *a* Story, only stories.

Narratives, then, are a way to manage time. Stories fold time back onto itself by blending temporalities. When families get together, they tell and retell the classics. The time your sister, Patricia, got in trouble for sneaking out of the house; or, the time your brother Manuel ate all of the flan you made for a party; or, the way your mother used to iron your dad's underpants and undershirts. These are ways that narratives negotiate time and restructure history. By telling and retelling the classics, storytellers affectively invite the past into the present. The feelings of frustration about the flan or how ridiculous it is to have creases in underpants are once again made real. Fingers are pointed and brows furrowed. Tears of laughter are shed. Emotions come flooding back and the past is made present. Stories fold time onto itself so that the past and present touch. Entangled, the past and the present become harder and harder to parse out.

In affectively sitting next to each other, the past and the present, are not confused, though. They are both simultaneously the same and distinct. Stories, therefore, also demonstrate the multiplicity of history. That is, that there is not one History, capital h, but many histories. If Manuel is around, he would inevitably have something to say about the disappearing flan. He would recount how *he* remembers that late night, when he came home from work, tired and hungry. How he took only a small piece but then had to cut another piece to even it out in order to make the custard-like dessert look untouched. But he miscut and had to re-square his square until there was no more flan to square. How he, now sated, then slipped to bed with no one the wiser. How, in the morning, when you accused him, your mother pointed out: "How could he? He's asleep!" Manuel's, yours, and your mother's stories are not in contradiction, per se. Some facts change, one character's voices might be more prominent, some intentions are augmented,

yes. But there is not one more real version than the other. For your mother, there is no way Manuel could have eaten the flan. Similarly, your version of events does not change Manuel's. They all exist, side-by-side at the kitchen table forty years later.

This is how it is with the stories of the appearance of Santiago in Loíza. There are multiple narratives with different actors, different perspectives, and different scenarios. Everyone I spoke with about Santiago's miraculous appearing agreed that there is no one true version of the events but they would still then go on to tell me the "real" history. They would even say that no one knows what really happened. But that would not stop them from telling me the sequence of events that led to la fiesta. During my time in Loíza, I counted no less than four versions of how Santiago appeared and was told on multiple occasions that this, the version being told, was the real one. The accounts of the Santiago story exist in multiplicity. There are mad Santiago stories. The multiple lives of Santiago, though, do not need to be reconciled to a preconceived form of logical coherence. Instead, the multiple lives of Santiago illustrate the emotions and concerns of the people who tell his stories.

By processing his image through the streets, Loiceños attempted to extend a moment, like an "ahora." What was originally a one-day feast day was turned into a three-day celebration through the addition of two more images of Santiago, which were commissioned after the original was miraculously found. That three-day feast was eventually extended to a week as more and more sponsors and participants joined in the festivities. Today, la fiesta is a ten-day carnival with celebrants coming from all over the world. By retracing and reenacting the movement of the image of Santiago from Pueblo to Medianía Alta, Loiceños attempt to gather something of history and make it present again. Like the telling and retelling of familial classics, the Santiago stories reproduces historical affects and blends the present with the past. The

procession itself mimics the movement of Santiago from Pueblo to Medianía Alta, the costuming transforms Loiceños into historical characters, and the images of Santiago function as pieces of a long-lost history from “*tiempos ancianos*,” as older residents would say. Time is becoming mad.

In order to understand the madness of la fiesta, we need a mad approach to history. We need someone who can help guide us through the multiple, contradictory, and messy history of la fiesta. La loca, the extraordinary woman who appears throughout la fiesta, presents herself as powerful guide. La loca is a multiplicity. She is not a singular person, nor an overdetermined festival role. During any given year, there will be multiple locas processing along calle 187. Some performers will put on their nightgowns and handkerchiefs yearly; some of these performers will even become locally famous, like Willian a loca I met during my fieldwork. Others will only don their costume once. There is no record of who will play la loca this year or next, no sign-up sheet, and no casting. No one is designated to play her. Anyone can be la loca—or loca, even. She simply appears. Therefore, she, offers insight into the mad history of la fiesta via her own multiplicity.

Unlike other festival characters, her costume is non-artisanal and can be made at home on a whim. For traditional festival characters, namely, el caballero or el vejigante, costumes are made by artisans and passed down within families from generation to generation. The Ayala family, for example, is considered to be the premier artisans of vejigante masks, which are made from dried coconut. The garments, too, are artisan made, beautifully intricate, and ornate. La loca’s costume, on the other hand, is usually made from things cheaply purchased from the store or borrowed from immediate family. Men usually borrow their mother’s or sister’s nightgowns or dresses. If they wear a wig as part of their performance, it is usually something off the rack, un-styled, and ill-fitting. For those who forgo a wig, a handkerchief tied at the front is usually the

way to go. Like Santiago and la fiesta, then, she is a network of disparate parts forced together. She is a network of interrelated images, cultural histories, and re-imaginings. And like the statue of Santiago found in Medianía Alta, she too appears and disappears.

She, then, suggests something of instability in substance and in time. As a messy network of overlapping and resonating images, costumes, and performances, she is also a method for understanding history and especially the history of la fiesta. She is an amalgamation of the Spanish Catholic imagination, the imagined African woman, and the experience of enslaved and free Black people in Puerto Rico. She is the personification of competing histories, temporalities, and affects. Performed and re-performed each year, those histories are brought back to life, sometimes infused with new and other meanings. None of this, however, is straightforward history. It is rather a history meanders, zigzags, and folds back onto itself.

In this chapter, I use la loca as a hermeneutic to interpret the multiple and competing histories of the discovery of the image of Santiago. Central to this chapter is la loca's blackening, her literal face makeup and the theoretical method by which she owns and negotiates colonial history. This is a mad, Black history. This chapter tracks two histories of Santiago. The first recounts the Spanish story of Santiago's epiphany in the ninth century. The second, the contemporary Puerto Rican version.

I begin this chapter by analyzing la loca. I describe the make-up of la loca: what she looks like and her paraphernalia. In this section, I introduce Willian, one of the performers I spoke with during my fieldwork in Loíza. Through him, I give a brief introduction to the behavior and the look of la loca. By describing her look and mannerisms and her persona, though, we are forced backwards in time to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the violent the history of enslavement and degradation of a continent and its people. As such, she

sets up for the us the long history of raced, gendered, and religious antagonism in Puerto Rico (which will be further analyzed in Chapter Two). Unlike the miraculous image of Santiago, she does not appear from nothing. Therefore, from contemporary performances of la loca, we turn backwards to our next historical moment: ninth century Spain. This portion of the mad history of Loíza is divided into two parts: Santiago in Spain and Santiago in Puerto Rico. Our mad history then ends with how Loiceños take up colonial and racist tropes and reorganize them for their own purposes—how they blacken it. That is to say, how they reimagine colonial history and narrate themselves into that history.

Putting La Loca Together

Dressed in a nightgown during the day, hair and makeup a mess, accompanied by a makeshift broom, la loca might come off as haphazard. It takes time to look this bad. Or, better, to appear to look bad. It takes effort to have your lipstick smudged just so—that balanced mixture of messiness and precision. Stuffing one’s trousers and shirt to make larger buttocks and breasts means having to go through a series of clothing options in order to get the right symmetry between the pairs. In the end, you want la loca to be ridiculous, but believably so.

As I watched Willian paint his already Black face black, we made eye contact through his hand mirror. I was watching him become something else. It was an intimate moment. It was cut short, though. He let out a huge, boisterous guffaw. In that moment, his voice betrayed something of this appearance.

One of the reasons he likes playing la loca, he told me, is that he likes to have fun. He is a large man in a Spandex-like leopard print nightgown that fits snugly over his stomach. However, his laughter and his desire to have fun were more reminiscent of childhood

mischievousness than a 50-something year old man, who works two jobs to make ends meet. During the day, he works the counter in one of the many *panaderías* (“bakeries”) in Loíza. After his shift, he works part time as a delivery driver for a Pizza Hut in Carolina. Between the two jobs, he says he does not have much time for socializing. However, during la fiesta, he makes the time. “Maybe I don’t work tonight,” he told me in English. “El Gran Combo is playing tonight, at midnight,” he added, doing a basic salsa step in place. During la fiesta, bands from all over Puerto Rico perform for free in Loíza. His attitude toward work, even several hours before his shift is meant to start, is carefree and playful.

The white handkerchief he wears on his head is slightly greyed by stray marks as he paints his forehead and by the subsequent failures to completely wash away black makeup from once pristine white. He told me will not need to stuff his pants because he already has a large enough buttock, “*porque ya tengo nalgas suficientes*,” he said switching back to Spanish. He poked out his hip at me flirtatiously. More laughter as he playfully slapped his hip. He leaned in for a high five as visibly he bit his tongue. He was letting me in on his playfulness. His deep laugh further highlighted the contrast between himself and the person he was becoming. With each pass of the circular makeup applicator, Willian seemed further away. After a few moments, Willian’s deep voice was masked with an obviously put on, high pitched voice. Years of smoking made his high-pitched voice gravelly and coarse around the edges. Despite this, la loca had finally arrived. Like a sovereign who mounts their horse, la loca had taken possession of Willian.⁷² To say that Willian was completely erased, though, is too much. He and la loca

⁷² In Black Atlantic religions, the relationship between sovereigns (sometimes called “gods”) and their devotees is described using equestrian language. This is an inheritance of West African language wherein the gods take *possession* of a horse in order to perform certain acts in a community, such as healings and consultations. See Roberto Strongman, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

worked in tandem. She directed his body and he was what made her present. In that moment, I am reminded: *la loca* is not *sui generis*. *La loca* is constructed. Conjured, even.

Once arrived, *la loca* manifested herself as the incongruent admixture of theories of personhood and non-personhood across time. From year-to-year, with each performance and each performer, *la loca* changes ever so slightly. Some performers will want to emphasize certain characteristics while others will opt to highlight others. Willian, for example, decides to forgo the faux breasts and buttock citing his already large enough buttock. While *la loca* manifests herself differently each year and between each person, there are several characteristics that help us to locate her in the processional crowd (though not all of them need to be present at once). Peter Roberts, in his 2006 article on *la loca*, called these seven traits her “defining features.” He goes on to list them as: “(a) a painted face; (b) exaggerated breasts and buttocks; (c) mad woman; (d) man dressed as woman; (e) carrying a broom; (f) carrying a can; (g) asking for tips.”⁷³ Curiously, Roberts does not define what “(d) mad woman” means. Doubtless “*loca*” translates to “madwoman” and yet Roberts curiously has made the titular role a trait. Instead, I take the composition of his other traits as what makes *la loca* a madwoman. That is, the clashing elements between what would be considered normal behavior and mad behavior. Carrying a broom, for example, is an ordinary task. However, the broom that Willian carried with him was a tree branch, which was not the most effective for cleaning. Secondly, the broom is carried by a “man dressed as a woman” who goes around “asking for tips” for unrequested work brings the commonplace into question and, ultimately, into the realm of the mad. In terms of costume, what Roberts lists as “man dressed as woman” further pushes the envelope of madness. *La loca* is not simply out of place vis-à-vis her labor, she is also “out of gender.” *La loca* goes around *la fiesta*

⁷³ Roberts, “Distinctive Features of Las Locas,” 34.

in a nightgown and slippers, seemingly out of place and time. What is mad, then, is not the outfit itself but the occasion in which it is worn and by whom it is worn. Indeed, this is the very clothing, nightgown and slippers, I saw women of all ages wearing on their porches during my time in and around Loíza. In fact, during an early midweek morning Mass said in honor of Santiago at La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol in Medianía Alta, I saw several older women who lived near the árbol de corcho, the site where the first image of Santiago was found, standing in their nightgowns, slippers, and headwraps on their porches as our small procession made it ways back to La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol.

It should not be lost on us that what is being reproduced in la loca is a particular vision of Black femininity. From dress to mannerisms, those who dress as la loca are performing a socially imagined version of Black women—out of place, time, and gender. Performance theorist Lowell Fiet further refines Roberts’s point regarding her stylization, as a Black woman who cleans. In essence, it is not a mistake that these three—blackness, labor, and femininity—are brought together. Fiet writes that this triangulation represents “an individual from the lowest strata of social life.”⁷⁴ This is the Fanonian “zone of nonbeing” but still worse. For Fanon subjectivity was guided by its relationship to Man. La loca’s personhood, that is Black women’s, however, cannot even reach the zone of nonbeing. Black women exist in a realm that cannot even be theorized in terms of being. Thus, in la loca, we have the personification of the imagined Black Puerto Rican woman: she is mad. This is the biopolitical management that Melissa González argues that la loca manifests.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Lowell Fiet, *Caballeros, vejigantes, locas y viejos: Santiago Apóstol y los performos afropuertorriqueños* (San Juan: Terranova Editores, 2007), 132.

⁷⁵ González, “La loca,” 123.

La loca is mad, crazy, because she is out of time, out of place, and out of gender. Her gender magnifies her ostensibly “inappropriate” racialization and her racialization magnifies her “inappropriate” gender. Taken together these are not mutually exclusive categories but instead are intensities of the other. The categories of race and gender often come together and refract through each other in la loca. This is Spillers’s argument regarding the mutually influencing nodes of gender and race. La loca is connection between gendered and racialized constructions of the nonbeing, who is without subjectivity. Further, her labor is intensified by her race and gender. In this idealized (imagined) form, la loca is a Black woman who cleans the streets and begs for money.

Adding to this, during my time in Loíza, more often than not I did not see locas sweeping patios and asking for money. Overwhelmingly, I saw them interacting with procession observers on the side of calle 187 instead of approaching people’s homes. In their interactions with observers, they were more like jesters and tricksters who would flirt with men (especially) by blowing them kisses, getting uncomfortably close to them, or even hugging them. This behavior, antagonizing onlookers, adds an additional dimension to Roberts’s and Fiet’s characterization of la loca: one of sexual impropriety. She is overtly and overly sexual, something I elaborate on in Chapters Three and Four. Like Willian who offered enticements with his hip, la loca’s flirtatiousness further complicates the idealized Black woman. She not only occupies the lower recesses of the social world because of her gender, race, and labor, but she is inappropriately sexual with strangers. This overt sexuality is only further complicated by la loca’s gender, the admixture of the performer and the performed (if these can be separated). Though onlookers would hardly be fooled by la loca, that she flirts with men who ostensibly know she is more-than-a-woman complicates her sexuality and theirs. She is not just overly sexual; she is

transgressively, overly sexual in a country with a long history of anti-queer legislation and oppression.⁷⁶ Sexualization is commonplace in Puerto Rico, as it is the world around. These forms of sexuality adhere, however, to codes of heteronormative desire.⁷⁷ La loca complicates these heterosexual codes of public conduct via her transgression of them; the extra-ordinary woman goes beyond what is socially acceptable behavior for women and for Black women, in particular.⁷⁸

Taken together, la loca's gender and blackness, her performance and play at the limits of publicly tolerable sexuality, remit us to the history of slavery in Puerto Rico. I theorize this along the lines of what Saidiya Hartman calls "the afterlives of slavery," a concept by which she theorizes the long-lasting impacts of enslavement in contemporary society. Hartman writes:

If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, impoverishment.⁷⁹

While Hartman's concept is here limited to the United States, I, along with others argue that the afterlife she refers to exists in other parts of the world affected by enslavement.⁸⁰ Bringing them together, I argue that la loca is another effect of the afterlife of slavery, the skewed vision of life.

⁷⁶ Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, "El nuevo rostro de Orlando: La nueva cara de la puertorriqueñidad," in *Escenas transcaribeñas: Ensayos sobre teatro, performance y cultura* (San Juan: Isla Negra Editores, 2018), 292.

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

⁷⁸ Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁷⁹ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006), 6.

⁸⁰ For example, see: Lisa Brock, "Editor's Note: Black Cuban Revolutionaries, Socialism, and the Afterlife of Slavery," *Souls* 21, no. (2019): 255–260; Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

It is not coincidental that she is positioned in the lowest strata of life, as Fiet argues. It is the result of a racial calculus and political arithmetic. She is a limited vision of what Black women could possibly be: the overly sexual, street sweeper, and beggar. Moreover, she is imagined, in all of this, as mad. However, as this dissertation will argue, the afterlife of slavery and *la loca* do not foreclose other possibilities. That is to say, she *is* a remnant of enslavement but what she performs and unveils is so much more, as we will see the next chapter. For the moment, though, suffice to say that part of what she unveils is the multiple and competing ways in which history is made. In pointing to her, she points us backwards to a history that is not so distant. As our guide, *la loca* expresses the contemporary moment first. She details herself, her dress, and her behavior. All of those elements, though, are linked backward. Now *la loca* tells a longer history. She is not so much concerned with the historicity of narrative. Instead, she is interested in how people insert and re-insert themselves into history. She is interested in how people paint themselves to embody the history they portray—even when that history does not require makeup.

Santiago's In/As Spain

Though Santiago's hagiographic life did not begin in ninth century Spain, his ties to *la loca* can be traced there. Through a series of interconnected events, Santiago took on the theopolitical role as protector and provider for Spanish Catholics. Historian Thomas Kendrick synthesizes these events in what he calls "the Santiago creed," a statement of belief conveying the social, cultural, and religious importance of Santiago.⁸¹ The creed summarizes the myths

⁸¹ Kendrick's creed is arranged into four major parts, which are as follows: firstly, that St. James evangelized what is now known as Spain in the first century; secondly, that the Virgin Mary appeared to St. James and told him to build a church in Zaragoza; thirdly, that after his execution, he was buried in Galicia; and lastly, that in the ninth century, he appeared on earth to help Catholics win a decisive battle during the conquest of Muslim territories in southern Spain. See T. D. Kendrick, *St James in Spain* (London: Methuen & Co., 1960), 13.

surrounding Santiago, including his first century pilgrimage to Spain to evangelize it and his eventual ninth century appearance to King Ramiro I. While Kendrick uses the language of “creed,” it should be noted that there is no ritually recited or maintained statement to that effect. Instead, what Kendrick calls a “creed” is more of an implied, sociocultural unifying sentiment among Spanish Catholics, which had centuries long effects.

As a “creed-not-creed,” no Spanish person, much less, no Loiceño, would be able to recite Kendrick’s creed. What is useful about Kendrick’s language, though, is the way it helpfully illustrates how Santiago influenced Catholic life and theology in the ninth century and how that influence extended into the colonization of the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For our purposes, I will narrow our focus onto a particular mythological event that Kendrick captures in his creed instead of focusing on the creed in its entirety. I am interested in the portion of the creed that discusses Santiago’s epiphany in Clavijo, wherein Santiago is said to have promised to help the Catholic army defeat their Moorish enemies. As I will discuss more thoroughly below, it is important to frame the story of Santiago in Spain and eventually in Puerto Rico in terms of Catholic-Moorish antagonism because of how that history makes its way into the performances and images found in Loíza today (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5, for example). Other elements of the Santiago creed, such as his evangelization of Spain in the first century, or his burial there do not make their way to Loíza and, therefore, do not command our attention in the same way as miraculous militaristic assistance against Moors.

According to Kendrick, “St James appeared to the sleeping King Ramiro I in a dream and announced that he had been specially commissioned by Jesus Christ to take Spain under his protection, and to prove at once the advantages to the Spaniards of [St. James’s] appointment, he went on to promise Ramiro victory on the following day in a battle in which the apostle said he

himself would take part.”⁸² Loyal to his word, the next day, St. James appeared “at the head of the Spanish army, visible to all, as he had promised, and so inspired the Spaniards that the Moors were hopelessly overwhelmed and routed.”⁸³ This portion of the creed, that Santiago aided and inspired the Catholic army against their Moorish enemies, remains an important, though, less emphasized aspect of la fiesta in Puerto Rico. Most obviously, this sentiment is captured in the miraculously appearing image of Santiago, discussed below. But it is also captured in two of the costumes, el vejigante and el caballero, wherein el caballero is imagined as an avatar of Santiago and el vejigante of the Moor. Important to note is that while they are traditionally thought of as enemies, these antagonisms do not make their way into contemporary performances during la fiesta. La loca, on the other hand, does not appear as part of the original legend. Instead, she forces her way into the Santiago narratives by appearing and processing the images of Santiago in Loíza.

I would like to point out Kendrick’s language of “Spanish” and “Moor” as representing a continuation, and an illustration, of the mythic origin story I am tracing here. While Kendrick’s work is historical, the language he uses to distinguish between Catholics and Moors, for example, draws from and perpetuates a theological understanding of Spanishness being distinct from “Moorishness.” Conflating the Catholic parts of Spain with the word “Spanish” belies the reality that Spain, during the time period Kendrick wrote about, was not simply “Catholic,” which is what his usage implies. On the other hand, “Moor” reads as an ethno-religious designation that excludes them from “Spanishness.” For Kendrick, either purposefully or unwittingly, the two are mutually exclusive categories. Conflating Spain and Catholicism serves

⁸² Kendrick, *St James*, 22.

⁸³ Kendrick, *St James*, 22.

to create the narrative that Spain had indeed been given over to Santiago—that Spain was/is Catholic. For Spanish Catholics, Santiago’s appearing was a sign of what Kendrick’s language implies: that Spain was God’s to give to the Catholics. In his historical account, Kendrick’s work repeats Santiago’s promise—Spain belongs to Santiago. This promise, though, does not die in the ninth century. Indeed, the mythical appearing developed in unexpected ways, well beyond Clavijo and Ramiro.

Catholic priest and anthropologist David Ungerleider Kepler notes how this legendary ninth century wartime assistance affected not only ecclesiastical and monarchic life, but also popular devotion and practice. He writes that “the figure of Santiago inspired popular resistance against the Moors and fortified nascent Spanish national identity, unifying different kings under the same struggle against the Moors.”⁸⁴ In Ungerleider Kepler’s summary, we begin to see the formation of an identity based on Santiago’s actions for and against a particular group. That is, in defining the Spanish self, they also define what is not Spanish (not unlike Kendrick). Important to keep in mind is the overt ways in which these identities were ethno-religious. As religiously different parts of Spain battled to claim land for themselves or battled for existence, the Santiago creed inspired the linking of “Spanish” to “Catholic.” Santiago helped to solidify the Catholic claim to land, specifically Spain but as mentioned above, to all future lands that Catholics would claim, as I will detail below. However, the power of the creed was not simply in narrating a divine right to geographic territories, but also functioned to create a corollary position for their enemies, as enemies of the divine (see also Chapter Two). If the land of Spain is given to Catholics by Jesus through Santiago, then anyone who opposes is not simply disputing land claim but also disputing divine decree. The enemies of God need not be Moors or Jews, who

⁸⁴ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 54

were occasionally grouped together,⁸⁵ but anyone who doubts that God has given Spain or other lands to Catholics. Thus, we can say that those who oppose are not unlike la loca—a social outcast, a “heathen” to stands are margins of society and social acceptability. We can see some of the foundations being laid for the transformations Santiago will undergo, from meek pilgrim, to Santiago Matamoros (“the Moor-killer”), and eventually Santo Guerrero (“Warrior Saint”) in the Americas.

Santiago In/Against Puerto Rico

After his mythic assistance on the battlefield in Spain, Santiago was not done aiding Catholics in their conquest of land. As anthropologist Ricardo Alegría notes, by the early part of the sixteenth century, Santiago was already being invoked on the island of Puerto Rico; however, this time, the enemies were not the Moors—they were the inhabitants of Vieques, a small island off the east coast of the Puerto Rican mainland. Months earlier, the Indigenous Taínos attacked Spanish settlements in Loíza. In retaliation, in 1515, “under the cry of ‘Santiago!’, the governor Don Cristóbal de Mendoza attacked the Caribbean Indians of Vieques, in this way avenging the attack the Indians had recently carried out against the Spanish settlements in Loíza.”⁸⁶ In the mind of Spanish colonists, Santiago helped once, centuries before, defeat an enemy and he would surely help again. Note how in Alegría’s account the cry is simply “Santiago!” No other words were necessary; the cry “Santiago!” gathered together all of the complexity of Catholic-Moorish antagonism, Santiago’s promise to defeat the Moors, and the reclamation of land, and dropped it into Puerto Rico.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Boyarin, *The Unconverted Self: Jews, Indians, and the Identity of Christian Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 39.

⁸⁶ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 18.

This 1515 cry is not the only time “Santiago!” would be invoked in Puerto Rico. Nearly a century later, the “cry” would be concretized. In San Juan, the capital city west of Loíza, the then-governor used Santiago in the building of the city’s fort. Alegría notes: “In 1608, the governor Don Gabriel Rojas constructed Fort Boquerón, dedicating it to Santiago, to whom he was very devoted.”⁸⁷ In San Juan, then, the cry of “Santiago!” is literally built into the structure of a military base. This is Santo Guerrero—the militarization of Santiago against the indigenous inhabitants.

As Santiago is brought to new contexts, he and his attendant symbols and meanings morphed ever so slightly. On the one hand, the Catholic-Moorish antagonism gives way to Catholic-Indigenous antagonism. On the other hand, he takes on a settler form—no longer actively attacking—but still claiming Puerto Rico. Moreover, the multiple forms that Santiago takes in Puerto Rico means that his enemies or those he is being invoked against must also change or must also come into multiple forms. In Puerto Rico, the enemy is not the Moor and the land is not Spain, but Santiago and his promise still stand.⁸⁸ Therefore, Santiago shifts in the context of Puerto Rico to become “Santo Guerrero,” a generalizable patron saint who can be invoked in contexts like Puerto Rico all without completely changing *who* Santiago is and *for whom* he is.⁸⁹ As Santo Guerrero, Santiago demonstrates how histories multiply in excess of

⁸⁷ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 18.

⁸⁸ This is not to say that there were no Moors in Puerto Rico or elsewhere in the Americas as a result of Spanish colonization. Indeed, “Muslims first made their way to the Americas as early as 1492 working as sailors aboard the same ships that would bring Christopher Columbus to the Caribbean. These, though, sailors would have come aboard these ships came as ‘crypto-Muslims,’ hiding their faith because the Spanish crown forbade the emigration of Muslims and recent converts to Catholicism (*moriscos*) to the Americas.” See Alejandro Escalante, “The Long Arc of Islamophobia: African Slavery, Islam, and the Caribbean World,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no. 1 (2019): 182. Instead, the way that Spaniards in Puerto Rico invoked Santiago indicates that their enemy had shifted away from Moors to Indigenous populations.

⁸⁹ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 58.

what might be called the “original” story. In this context, the Santiago creed outgrew the constraints of the Iberian Peninsula and found new forms in the Americas. But even there, Santiago proliferated.



Figure 2.1 “El Encuentro” by Daniel Lind-Ramos. This is the site of the árbol de corcho, where Atilano Villanueva is said to have found the original image of Santiago. This event is featured in the mosaic on the right panel. In this photo are two of the three Santiagos, de las Mujeres (left) and de los Niños (right). Photo by author.

Santiago In/As Loíza

Like the miraculously appearing saint in the Spanish Catholic legend, Loiceños have their own version of the events of Santiago’s appearance. However, if you ask any Loiceño about the history of Santiago, you are unlikely to hear the above history. In fact, for many Loiceños the above history is secondary to their own. Instead, they manage the history of Santiago by retelling the story of who he is and from where you came. They multiply Santiago further and make new connections and relationships through these retellings.

While many features and facets of la fiesta are drawn from the above history, they matter less in the day-to-day life of a Santiago devotee in Loíza. More than likely, Loiceños would tell you of the miraculous appearance of Santiago in Medianía Alta, an eastern barrio of Loíza. In

their hearts and minds, Santiago has nothing to do with the distant past, nothing to do with Moors in Spain or their counterparts in sixteenth century Puerto Rico. In the Spanish lore, Santiago is Santo Guerrero—a militarized figure cast against ethnic and religious Others, namely Moors and Indigenous Taínos. However, for Loiceños, Santiago sides with the poor and vulnerable; he is protective. Moreover, he and his attendant performances, vestments, and images are all ways for Loiceños to develop a deeper, richer sense of community. As I will detail below, Santiago, who was once a figure of destruction of the Other, has been championed by that selfsame Other and made into a hero of the vulnerable.

While the specific history of the reversal is not my concern here, what I attempt to highlight at this point is the way in which the past, in the hands of those people it was meant to leave behind, can be made into something otherwise. In this sense, then, “the past” is not a set of objective facts but an ever-evolving relationship to stories and narratives that can be manipulated. As Loiceños have shown me and others, the past is an open space one can reach back into to find meaning for the present. The past is a way of narrating oneself into the present. They blacken history. Like *la loca* who paints her already Black face black. Loiceños adopt and adapt legends and stories to their own ends as a way of taking ownership of Santiago, *la fiesta*, and the attendant practices. In their hands, Santiago is transformed into a source of pride in their community.

Part of this history of transformation of Santiago from Warrior Saint to defender of the vulnerable can be told between the two churches that operate as the two ends of the procession. At one end of calle 187, in Pueblo, sits La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio. Pueblo is the central barrio of Loíza and was the area of Loíza first settled by colonists. Founded in 1645, La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio it is one of the island’s oldest churches. While the

church was originally named after the Holy Spirit, a gift from wealthy Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century added “San Patricio” to the church’s name.⁹⁰ Unlike the grand churches built in Europe and elsewhere in the seventeenth century, La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio is quite simple. Time worn images of the crucifixion, the Virgin Mary, and Joseph sit along the walls. Their colors are muted and sun-bleached. The wear and tear to the walls and pews adds to this subdued effect and gives the church a sense of modesty. The exception to this simplicity is the grandeur of the statue of San Patricio, which sits beyond the altar and is meticulously outfitted and cared for. The reredos on which he is placed is covered in intricately crafted gold (Figure 2.2). He is a huge, towering figure who looks over the congregation from behind the altar. His miter and cape are green, his sartorial colors.



Figure 2.2 The altar at La Parroquia Espíritu Santo y San Patricio. Photo by author.

⁹⁰ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 58–59.

In La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio, we encounter part of Loíza's history. Officially, San Patricio is the patron saint of Loíza. Though he receives significantly less attention than Santiago, he still remains an important part of Loíza. Green, San Patricio's sartorial color, appears all over the city on park benches and lampposts. Green is also part of the city's flag. Further, the belltower of this church is featured on the municipal flag. We can think of the green as representing the confluence of European immigrants and settlers to the city. In one sense, Santiago is brought to Puerto Rico through colonization and used in Loíza to subdue and eradicate ethnic and religious Others. In this way, La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio tells the story of the imposition of Catholicism on the Indigenous inhabitants and enslaved Africans, who these same Europeans either brought with them from Europe or acquired as human capital in Puerto Rico. This imposition, though, does not mean those colonized and enslaved by Spanish and Irish immigrants should be understood as docile recipients of European ideology. The fact that San Patricio takes a back seat to Santiago tells us something of the way that Loiceños have shown themselves to be actors in a world that would otherwise seek to erase them.

To the east and further along calle 187, in Medianía Alta, sits La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol, a modern church building with air conditioning, a more contemporary altar, and florescent lighting throughout. Built sometime in the 1970s, this church is much larger than the one in Pueblo. On the walls hang the Stations of the Cross and sun-bleached photo of Pope John Paul II. There is no ornate reredos at Santiago Apóstol. Instead, there are three images behind the altar (left to right): Joseph, the Crucifixion, and the Virgin Mary. Santiago does not sit high above the congregation looking down as San Patricio does in Espíritu Santo y San Patricio. When he is in his titular church, he sits amongst the congregation (Figure 2.3). While in Pueblo,

the ubiquitous color was green, here it is red: Padre Orlando Bonilla's vestments (noticeably out of sync with the liturgical calendar); the wall behind the altar; the pillars going up the walls; even people were purposefully dressed in red to attend Mass. The red represents Santiago, which is his sartorial color. During la fiesta, for example, those designated to carry the images of Santiago during the procession will wear red as a gesture of their affinity to him. Loiceños like the simplicity of the altar, they say it is a reflection of who they are. Moreover, the simplicity, they say, is the reason that Santiago chose them as his people. As such, they have made the church in his honor.



Figure 2.3 The altar at Santiago Apóstol during a Sunday Mass before la fiesta begins. Note Santiago de los Niños over the right shoulder of the woman in navy blue. To the right of Santiago de los Niños is Santiago de las Mujeres. Photo by author.

La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol, then, represents how Loiceños have attempted to and continue to negotiate their own Catholicism. While Espíritu Santo y San Patricio represents something of the history of imposition, Santiago Apóstol is a way for Loiceños to take what is imposed and make it theirs. Santiaguüito is humble, small and, therefore, his church should likewise reflect those values, they say. This humility is something they see in themselves, too. “Santiago chose us,” they told to me during almost every conversation. “He chose us because he

wanted to be with the people, not in the church.” The “us” here is important. “Us” are the people who live at the margins of society: the enslaved, the formerly enslaved, and their descendants. Loíza is majority Black Puerto Rican or *afrodescendiente* and as such, they see Santiago’s miraculous appearing to them, in their barrio, as a sign that Santiago chose the poor and meek over-against the rich and powerful, here represented by the Espíritu Santo y San Patricio, in Pueblo. The “choosing” they reference here refers to Santiago’s miraculous appearance in Medianía Alta.

The Mad Epiphanies of Santiago

You are likely to hear all manner of stories regarding the beginnings of devotion to Santiago. Inevitably, each storyteller will add their own twist. However, they all say the same thing: “*Imagínate,*” Mónica told me, “*la realidad es que nadie sabe la verdad.*” “Keep in mind, the reality is that no one knows the truth.” I was sat at her kitchen table. The front door of her apartment is open allowing the occasional cool, morning breeze into her home. A metal gate covers the doorway ensuring that only air can pass through—that and her miniature poodle, Dante. Despite just telling me that no one knows the history, Mónica proceeds to tell me which histories are more trustworthy than others. Some versions, she says, do not even include the miraculous apparition but instead lean on the miraculous use of an already existing image. The site where Santiago is said to have appeared, el árbol de corcho, is her primary criterion. These others that do not include el árbol are suspect, she argued. “Where did [the image of] Santiago come from, then?” As I sipped my coffee, Mónica recounted the true and the false histories of Santiago. In her kitchen, I gathered that there are no fewer than four versions of Santiago that are

told, each repeated with different emphases, depending on the storyteller and their flare for the extraordinary.

Mónica had a knack for storytelling. She used her whole body. From moment to moment, different characters made their way through her kitchen as she floated between the stove and the fridge. She used that small space as a stage to embody and bring to life historical events. When her hands were busy making scrambled eggs for herself, she substituted her pursed lips and used them to point. She was straightforward. She did not preface the fantastical with qualifiers or disclaimers; she simply stated the miraculous as fact. While some details overlapped and remained consistent, other details fall away and major characters are replaced by others. Two consistent things remain from story to story: first, Santiago’s appearing and disappearing, and, second, that the miracle took place in Medianía Alta. The rest is up to each storyteller it seems.



Figure 2.4 and 2.5 “Santiago de los Niños,” photographed at the home of his mantenedora, Rosa Julia. Note the decapitated head underneath the figure of Santiago. Photo by author.

Mónica began the first account of Santiago’s epiphany: an older woman left her home early in the morning to bathe in the sea near Medianía Alta and stumbled upon a miracle. In all likelihood, Mónica clarifies, she did not have running water in her home hence her bathing in the

sea. As the tide moved in and out, a strange thing occurred. In the appearing and disappearing shoreline, she saw a figure: a small statue of a mustachioed man with a sword in hand. He was white, as is the horse he is atop. The horse was reared back on its hind legs. Under the horse's two front legs is the decapitated head a dark-skinned man. Two times the woman tried to pick up the image but each time, the waves covered it and took the statue with them as they receded. Later, she called upon the priest in Pueblo to come and collect the statue. This version of the story coincides more or less with one of the histories that Alegría recorded.⁹¹ Alegría, though, added additional details, such as how the priest was able to finally take hold of the statue but beyond this, their versions are the same.⁹² Mónica warned, though, that this version is most likely not the truth. She did not pause between stories; she carried on without skipping a beat.

A fisherman from Medianía Alta stood on the shore, casting his net into the sea. While he fished, he noticed something strange left behind as each wave receded back into the sea: a statue. However, as the tide would come back in, the waves would cover the statue. And as the waves receded, the figure disappeared. After three appearances and disappearances, the fisherman, like the woman above, called on the Pueblo priest. The priest was able to take the statue in hand and “*y pues así es,*” Mónica said—“and, well, that’s how it is”—as she wiped her hands clean. This account, too, was marked with suspicion by Mónica. Her eyes narrowed as she tried to summarize what was wrong with these two accounts. Neither of them included the árbol de corcho, the cork tree or, as others Loiceños called it, *el palo de corcho* (Figure 2.1). Which is to say, that neither of these two accounts include the now-memorialized site of Santiago’s appearance. Interestingly enough, the mosaic at el palo de corcho includes elements of this

⁹¹ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 24.

⁹² Alegría, *La fiesta*, 24.

version of events. In Figure 2.1, above, in Daniel Lind-Ramos's artistic rendering of the epiphany and discovery of Santiago, he incorporated a fisherman kneeling prostrate before the image of Santiago at the base of a tree. The fisherman narrative is also included in Ungerleider Kepler's work on la fiesta. Importantly, he notes that this version is more popular amongst older residents.⁹³

By this time my coffee was cold. Mónica suggested that we should head over to el palo, as she called it, so I could see it for myself. As we made our way there, Mónica reassured me that the stories she had just finished recounting were myths. She asked the rhetorical question, as a kind of proof: "Why don't the other stories include el palo?" Meaning, el palo was an important element of the Santiago legends. The memorialization at el palo thus served as evidence that it is indeed the real site of Santiago's appearance (against the seaside variations) and the true story would include some kind of miracle as the memorial site.

We headed westward from Mónica's home in Río Grande to Loíza. In her grey Ford Bronco, Mónica gestured widely, to everything all at once. It was an older model but Mónica kept its interior immaculate. "Nothing has been the same since María," she said. Her tone was serious and matter-of-fact. Ever since September 2017, Puerto Ricans have been haunted by the ghosts of María. Power outages were routine and expected. Some roads were still derelict. At this point, María was not the topic of conversation but simply being outside prompted her. As we headed toward Loíza, we passed the St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, a luxury hotel, golf course, and gated neighborhood. It was set far back from the road. The neighborhood's sign was tiny and were it not for Mónica pointing it out, I would have missed it. "Ricky Martin has a house in there," she said. "It has its own private security; you can't get in without permission." She rolled

⁹³ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 57.

her eyes. She added that some US senator has a house there, too, but could not remember his name. Keep in mind: we were minutes away from one of the poorest cities in Puerto Rico.⁹⁴

Beyond this luxury residence, there is little development in the area.

A little further on, there was an abandoned golf course. I commented out loud, thinking its current state was due to María: “Even the golf courses were not spared,” I said. She corrected me: “No, that golf course was abandoned long before María hit.” I am reminded of the “other Mariás” that Sarah Molinari theorized; the multiple destructive forces that have visited the island, including capitalist extraction.⁹⁵ Mónica suddenly snapped her fingers. Talk of María reminded her that there is another origin story. Like the seaside variations, this one is also met with suspicion by Mónica. This did not stop her from recounting yet another Santiago legend. Just as in her kitchen, she enthusiastically told this version of events. Once a storm threatened to consume Loíza and Santiago came to the aid of the Loiceños. The rain and wind were so intense that the banks of the river to the east of Pueblo broke almost instantaneously. The sea to the north was quickly making its way inland as wave after wave crashed against the shore and crept inland. It seemed like the town would surely be lost. Devotees of Santiago banded together to parade the statue through the streets of Loíza asking Santiago for protection from the storm. Immediately, the storm disappeared and the river and the tide receded. Mónica had one problem with this story, though. She asked, to no one in particular: “Where did the statue come from,

⁹⁴ Cyndi Suarez, “The Hidden Narrative of Racial Inequality in Puerto Rico,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, August 26, 2019, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/hidden-narrative-racial-inequity-puerto-rico/>.

⁹⁵ Sarah Molinari, “Authenticating Loss and Contesting Recovery,” 286. Naomi Klein further details the way that colonialism via the 1920 Jones Act, debt relief austerity measures, and tax incentivization have further impoverished Puerto Rico. See Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018). In post-Muñoz Marín Puerto Rico where rapid industrialization was argued to be key to development and modernization (see Chapter Two), many Puerto Ricans left the coastal regions, moved inland, and left their agricultural work. This movement left places like Loíza to become “places of abandonment.” See Moira Alexandra Pérez, “The Place of Abandonment: Geography, Race, and Nature in Puerto Rico.” PhD diss., The University of California, Berkeley, 2002. ProQuest (AAT 3063517).

then?” This along with her “What about el palo?” were her two perennial questions regarding the miraculous appearing. For her, the storm story also did not satisfy her.

Shortly after we crossed the Río Herrera and were in Loíza, we made a quick right turn down a sideroad. Mónica parked her truck on the street in front of someone’s home. We finally arrived at el palo de corcho. El palo is tucked away down a nameless side street off the 187. It cannot be seen from the main road. The memorial (Figure 2.1) is situated just off the sidewalk, between houses. When Mónica and I arrived, it was midday and there was not much going on. I half expected more pomp and circumstance and excitement around el palo. But none was to be found. Some of the people who lived just around el palo were out on their porches, having a cigarette or just sitting, relaxing. Mónica and I were the only two people at el palo. I took out my phone to snap some pictures while Mónica told me the last remaining origin story, the one that I would hear consistently.

There was once an estate in Medianía Alta headed by Juana Lanzó and José María Villanueva. The estate had many employees who worked various agricultural jobs.⁹⁶ One worker, Atilano Villanueva, was tilling the ground, preparing it for planting. While he was working, he found a curious object at the base of a tree near where he was plowing: the image of Santiago. Being a humble and pious man, so Mónica says, he took the object to the church in Pueblo. However, the statue would not long stay there. The next day, as Atilano was working in the field, he again saw Santiago at the base of the cork tree. “*¡Válgame!*” he said. Atilano took the image again to the church in Pueblo. Santiago would not sit still; he returned to the base of

⁹⁶ Given that all the accounts are based on oral tradition and not dated, it is difficult to surmise the relationship between the Villanuevas and their “employees.” Alegría and Ungerleider Kepler both call him a “gentleman” (“*señor*”). However, cases such as Atilano’s wherein an “elite surname [is] coupled with his plebeian status suggests that he might have been a manumitted slave or a descendant of slaves.” Thus, his status as señor is likely applied retrospectively and does not indicate his status at the time. See Luis A. Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 244n17.

the tree. And again, Atilano would return the image to the church. At this point, Juana Lanzó knew that they had a miracle on their hands. She immediately dedicated the land to Santiago. “This is why we have el palo de corcho,” Mónica said. This version, with the image of Santiago found at the foot of a cork tree, is the most widely recorded in scholarly literature. Some of the details of the story are Mónica’s own, though. Other histories I heard described Atilano not as pious but as a simpleton who took the statue to the church because he did not want to get into trouble and only later would he eventually become a devotee. Still, the Villanueva story was the one that most Loiceños attached themselves to. Given that the statue moved between Pueblo and Medianía Alta, Loiceños interpreted the story as a sign that Santiago did not want to remain in the church but instead wanted to be with the people who are humble, working-class people. This is why there is no ornate reredos in La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol: he did not want to be enshrined in a church. Similarly, this is why Santiago does not sit over the church but instead sat with the congregation in the pews. This version of the events helps to co-create their identity as the oppressed and Santiago’s as their patron saint.

Mad, Black Santiagos

To this original image of Santiago, two other images were later added. These became known as “Santiago de las Mujeres” and “Santiago de los Hombres,” completing the ostensible Santiago family. Unlike Santiaguüito, however, these images do not have a miraculous story attached to them. Ungerleider Kepler notes that these two additional statues were brought from Spain in the twentieth century but does not give any specific information about this dating.⁹⁷ Noting the difference between these statues, Fiet states that the original, Santiaguüito, is made

⁹⁷ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 59.

from wood in a local, Puerto Rican style. While the two additional Santiagos have a noted Spanish style and are made from plaster.⁹⁸ Like the stories that circulate throughout Loíza about his appearance, the images of Santiago likewise proliferate. Santiago has multiple histories, epiphanies, likenesses, and constructions. Santiago is not a singular saint but a saint who exists in multiplicity. In this sense, then, Santiago is mad. Santiago's locura is not unlike the multiplicity that Deleuze and Guattari describe using crowds. They imagine an open plane with different actors and elements present. They write: "There is a teeming crowd in it, a swarm of bees, a rumble of soccer players, or a group of Tuareg. *I am on the edge of the crowd, at the periphery; but I belong to it, I am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or foot.*"⁹⁹ Though distinct, they are still connected. Importantly, there is neither subject nor object in crowd.¹⁰⁰ The various elements move like the swarm of bees or the group of footballers: together. So it is with the multiple Santiagos. It is not that the original Santiago, which ever one that could be, is the sole driving force behind stories about him that circulate. Indeed, even if we say that there is one original Santiago, is this Santiago not himself informed and influenced by the mad Santiagos?

The four above narratives of Santiago's epiphany have two main features that Loiceños emphasized throughout my time in Loíza: 1) Santiago's appearance in Medianía Alta and 2) what this meant for them. The first of these is more obvious in the storytelling. Except for the storm narrative, each version states this in one way or another. The other facet requires a bit more digging. It is not a usual part of the origin story, per se. Instead, the second facet comes alongside as a way of describing the mysterious apparition. Loiceños take Santiago's appearing

⁹⁸ Fiet, *Caballeros, vejigantes, locas y viejos*, 55.

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 29; emphasis original.

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

in Medianía Alta as a sign that he chose them. “Them” meaning the community members of Medianía Alta, who see themselves as distinct from the members of Pueblo or the other surrounding communities. Historically, this difference has more to do with who resided in the outskirts of Pueblo, in places like Medianía Alta: enslaved, their descendants, and free Black people. This demarcation still exists today. As Samiri Hernández Hiraldo explains, “Medianía Alta residents considered themselves extremely marginalized and discriminated against by the urban downtown [Pueblo] Catholic community.”¹⁰¹ For this group of social outcasts, Santiago’s choosing them is no accident: his choice signifies his “being on their side,” so to speak. By telling the story of Santiago through this image, Loiceños narrate themselves into history that would otherwise leave them out. They blacken him, as *la loca* does her face. Despite his whiteness, he becomes a part of the narrative structure of Black Puerto Ricans and their effort to create a history for themselves from the past. Loiceños have recast the history of colonization and enslavement for their own purposes, namely, narrating themselves into a history that might otherwise exclude them. This is what I have termed “blackening.” It performs and embodies multiplicity and redundancy that undermines and takes ownership of that which was meant to injure.

Beside re-envisioning the history of Santiago above, Loiceños reverse the violent colonial history of his name and likeness by parading his images through the street and by dressing up as one of several festival characters, like *la loca*. In many ways, the violent history that Santiago once embodied is subverted through his being championed by the very people he would have, in the Spanish colonial imagination, sought to eradicate—the ethno-religious Other. Instead, as the

¹⁰¹ Hernández Hiraldo, “If God Were Black and From Loíza,” 77.

champion of the poor and vulnerable, Santiago is appropriated and made to mean something quite different than previously intended.

For example, in the wake of María and the protests of summer 2019, many people had shirts bearing phrases like “#*PuertoRicoSeLevanta*” or “¡*Ricky Renuncia!*” In fact, during a Mass that began at el árbol de corcho, one could see “Se Levanta” tagged on a building as the procession made its way back to La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol (Figure 1.1). The phrase is meant to encapsulate the island’s endurance in the face of destruction. On the other hand, “¡Ricky Renuncia!” was the rallying cry for residents who were fed up with then-governor Ricardo Rosselló and his administration.

After weeks of protest, Rosselló finally and begrudgingly stepped down. That these two shirts, among others, were worn during la fiesta indicates the way Loiceños see la fiesta as a place of political and social commentary and potential. As the shirts worn during the procession indicate, Loiceños used this procession as the time to make political statements. Raquel Ayala, who we will meet in chapter two, guessed that many people might not come this year because of the protests taking place at La Fortaleza in San Juan (see Chapter Three). Blackening is a subtle form of subversion. It does not seek to be the ultimate solution or even *a* solution. It is a means of survival in the moment. It is an epistemological and ideological method of self-narration.

The procession itself acts like a reverse colonization by retelling the history of conquest. Instead of Santiago being paraded through the streets by Catholic priests and conquistadors, Loiceños parade the images of Santiago in an effort to unify themselves. In that sense, then, the images of conquest, Santiago and all of his attendant symbols, are coupled with new meanings that are motivated by a new set of practices important to residents. This contemporary parading needs to be seen alongside, as a swarm, with the historical account provided by Kendrick,

Ungerleider Kepler, and Alegría above. That is, how Spanish Catholics used Santiago's name and image to subdue the people of Loíza. In the hands of Loiceños, the images of oppression and subjugation have become ways of celebrating themselves. In distinction to the above, however, Loiceños do not blacken Santiago, per se. Instead, they blacken themselves. That is to say, they claim themselves, the likeness, and their culture as something to be proud of and worthy of celebration.

Conclusion

Loíza is a city full of stories. Often, these stories take on new and unexpected forms. In this particular case, the story of Santiago appearance in Loíza has multiplied beyond the boundaries of "history." Santiago has proliferated new and different forms that do not conform to what would be considered rigid historiography. The narratives often contradict each other and elements change between each version. However, these slight mutations are never ironed out. Instead, the multiple lives and iterations of Santiago sit beside each other. Santiago is multiple, contradictory, and avoid reconciliation. Santiago is loca.

This chapter began by considering how Loiceños use stories to manage time and history. Using this device, I turned to Santiago to consider how Loiceños managed the history of Santiago. In the Spanish history, Santiago is the Warrior Saint who drives out the Moors from southern Spain and claims land. This history begins in the ninth century when Santiago is said to have appeared to King Ramiro I on the eve of a decisive battle against Moors. Santiago tells Ramiro that Jesus Christ himself has sent Santiago to claim the land for Spain and promises Ramiro victory in the next day's effort. Centuries later, Spanish colonizers take up this legend in their conquest of Puerto Rico, driving out the Indigenous population.

However, when the tiny statue of Santiago appeared under the cork tree in Medianía Alta, this history faded into the background. Santiago was no longer the Warrior Saint but instead the protector of the poor and vulnerable. In the stories that circulate throughout Loíza concerning this apparition, Santiago is understood to have eschewed the places of prominence in society and instead to have chosen to be among the humble and meek. Through the tell and re-telling of the stories of Santiago, Loiceños have found a way to narrate themselves into a history that would otherwise erase them. Thus, through the telling of and the enacting of the Santiago narrative, Loiceños have blackened him—they have taken that which was meant as harm and turned it into good.

CHAPTER 2: 1510: ONE OR SEVERAL AFRICAS?

It's the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time.

—Édouard Glissant¹⁰²

Franny is listening to a program on wolves. I say to her, "Would you like to be a wolf?" She answers haughtily, "How stupid, you can't be one wolf, you're always eight or nine, six or seven."

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹⁰³

Departure and Containment

In 2009, the poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant is on a ship bound for Brooklyn, New York. Due to health reasons, he can no longer travel by plane and so he is obliged to travel by boat. Filmmaker and critic Manthia Diawara accompanies him to film and interview. In his interview with Glissant, they talk about the nature of poetry, Glissant's *oeuvre*, and traveling itself. Diawara asks Glissant: "What does departure mean to you?" Glissant responds: "It's the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time. In other words, for me every diaspora is the passage from unity to multiplicity."¹⁰⁴ *Consent à n'être plus un seul*. Consent not to be a single being. Departures, for Glissant, are potentials for extending beyond unity, beyond oneself, and beyond what was previously thought possible. Departure, as extension, is a proliferation of the self. And from that proliferation, excess. A becoming-excess wherein there is no fixed state, only potential.¹⁰⁵ In excess, we are not met with

¹⁰² Édouard Glissant, Manthia Diawara, and Christopher Winks, "Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28 (2011): 5.

¹⁰³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 30.

¹⁰⁴ Glissant et al., "Édouard Glissant," 5.

¹⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 285.

univocality but polyvocality. In excess we are met with contradiction, too—inevitably. Contradictions, however, need not be overcome. Contradictions confound received tradition and metanarratives. “Consent not to be a single being” means things can be multiple, have multiple definitions, and even contradictory definitions. But it also means that it is possible for “things” to have *no* definition. This, no definition, is *locura*. It is something that does not make sense because it does not comport with traditional epistemological frameworks, such as dialectical or Platonist models.

We should note Glissant’s language: “every diaspora”. He continues in the interview: “The Africans in the New World—African Americans, but also the Antilleans, Brazilians, etc.—escaped the abyss and carry within them the abyss’s dimension. And I think the abyss’s dimension is not, contrary to what one might believe, the dimension of Unity, but rather the dimension of Multiplicity.”¹⁰⁶ Glissant has in mind the violent history of capture vis-à-vis the Middle Passage, what he calls the “abyss”—that realm of infinite possibility.¹⁰⁷ Diasporization, specifically through enslavement is not simply a negation but is also an opportunity to extend beyond the present moment. Indeed, the negation did not destroy the “object”—negation multiplies it (Chapter Four). Once enslaved Africans departed for the Americas, they too proliferated in new and undefinable ways. New “Africas” are created along the way. This is not a redemptive movement for enslavement but rather a moment of refusal of closure.

We should turn our attention to Glissant’s use of “consent.” “Consent”, as literary critic Fred Moten reminds us, is not “to give permission,” as if the enslaved could or would *give*

¹⁰⁶ Glissant et al., “Édouard Glissant,” 5.

¹⁰⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 8.

consent to their social death.¹⁰⁸ Instead, “consent” is a way of expressing “a nonperformative condition or ecological disposition, [it] is another way of approaching what he calls the ‘poetics of relation.’”¹⁰⁹ “Consent,” therefore, is a form of relationality, the interconnectedness of everything, ultimately. Glissant writes of relation: “each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”¹¹⁰ Departure, then, is linked with something else, something beyond it, which extends “departure” beyond itself. Departure is a form of relation.

Departure, in the case of Glissant’s and Diawara’s trip from Southampton to Brooklyn, requires some kind of containment. They cannot simply “depart.” They must take a vessel which will help them get from one point to another. In a sense, they must be contained. In containing them, the vessel (momentarily) restricts their movement. Departure, then, is linked with containment. Or, at least, attempts to contain. Furthermore, when they land, their new relationship with the world around them will be marked by both containment and departure. Their movement, containment, and arrival are all relationally connected together. Importantly, relationality is not a backward movement toward the origin. Instead, they are linked together in the present moment: their movement anticipates arrival; or, their departure requires movement, for example. Thus, relationality is a network of mutually influencing nodes that exercise differing forces of intensity on other nodes.

In this chapter, I argue that these concepts, Glissant’s “departure” and “consent” and along with my “containment,” provide a hermeneutic by which to understand the departure and containment of enslaved Africans in Loíza. Enslavement marks the moment by which Africanity

¹⁰⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), xv.

¹¹⁰ Glissant, *Poetics*, 11.

is contained. Literally. However, recall that containment is linked with departure, arrival, and movement. Therefore, containment is not “*totalité*,” as Glissant might have said.¹¹¹ Vessels of containment cannot universally hold. Some contents jump ship. Indeed, some are even thrown overboard. Some cargo will find a new way of being at sea or at land. Some might not find another way of *being*. There exists, therefore, that which the vessel cannot contain.

This chapter has three movements. In the first movement, I trace the attempt to “capture” Africanity vis-à-vis enslavement and the ramifications of that capture, namely, Africanity being cast as negative. Therefore, to begin, I consider the impact of enslavement on conceptions of “Africanity,” arguing that the material conditions of contemporary society are fundamentally anti-Black. This means that possibilities of personhood or subjectivity are fundamentally limited for Black people. Enslavement and ineffability will become important bookends for understanding *la loca*’s Africanity.

The second movement is a consideration of the dialectical movements between departure and capture. I offer two case studies that illustrate the back and forth between these two possibilities. The first is of containment, leading from the aforementioned history of enslavement. Attempts to contain Africanity come via the distance one puts between themselves and it. This comes from my conversations with a “*Loiceña ausente*,” Leticia. For Leticia, Africanity, when concerned with religious life and craft, should be avoided because of its presumed demonic ties. The second case study I offer in this section is based on my conversations with the Ayala family, the second-generation musicians, dancers, and mask-makers who have lived in Loíza all of their lives. Throughout my time with them, I discovered that they used “Africa” to refer to ethno-cultural markers, along with race, and not religious

¹¹¹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 76.

practices, per se. Moreover, for them, Africanity was something to be celebrated. It is important to keep in mind that for the Ayalas and others, this form of Africanity was immutable and was tied to their race and ethnic heritage.

In the last section of this chapter, I return my attention to la loca. La loca is a particularly interesting case of Africanity. However, she does not engage with these negative or positive forms of Africanity. Instead, she is there to disturb them (chapter 3). Outside of this dialectic, then, there is a third and final form of Africanity that I am interested in. “African” in this final section lies outside of what we can currently understand or describe. What is the double blackness of la loca, for example? La loca, as the madwoman, who does ridiculous things, dresses oddly, looks strange, is an expression of Africanity that slips beyond words and concepts. In this section, I draw from Sylvia Wynter to argue the relationship between the mad and the ineffable.

Notes on Enslavement

Loiceños partake in and exist in a world shaped by the Middle Passage, the movement of people as cargo in holds of ships. As such, they are caught in what Christina Sharpe calls “the wake” of the Middle Passage.¹¹² According to Sharpe, “the wake” is not unlike the wake that is left behind as a ship passes through a body of water. “The Event” (the ship’s passing), for example, is over but the signs of its passing (the wake) and its aftermath (the turbulent waters) give evidence to the Event.¹¹³ As such, “in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always,

¹¹² Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹¹³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 3.

to rupture the present.”¹¹⁴ However, in the wake of the ships that brought Africans to the Americas, the wake was not simply aqueous; no, the Middle Passage “produces Black death and trauma.”¹¹⁵ Loiceños are caught up in this wake. While, relatively speaking, Spanish merchants, slavers, and plantation owners imported less people to Puerto Rico than to Cuba, or the French to Haiti, or the English to their thirteen colonies, the presence of enslaved Africans merits further study of the island and its residents as part of the Black Atlantic. Part of what this dissertation does is build off the important work of Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf, whose respective work engaged these important questions.¹¹⁶ Their work, though, overemphasized capitalism’s effects and undertheorized rebellion against it.¹¹⁷ I reconceptualize Loiceños in terms of the wake and the blackening—that is, their ability to make things porous and find otherwise.

The second reason for beginning with enslavement, leading from the first, is that with the disembarkation of African people in the Americas, there was the inadvertent creation of multiple “Africas” (plural). Consent à n’être plus un seul, *non*? As the enslaved made their homes, whatever those could be, in foreign lands, they did so with whatever history, language, and knowledge they brought with them from their homelands. They were Africans in new lands creating homes and memories of homes. They were multiplying and proliferating Africas. Ships stuffed with human cargo leaving port, at sea, and docked on new land extend “Africa” and its contents. Note, though, that this is violent, excessive proliferation. Africa bleeds. Or, more

¹¹⁴ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 11.

¹¹⁶ See Sidney Mintz, *The Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (New York: Norton, 1974); and Eric Wolf, “San José: Subcultures of a ‘Traditional’ Coffee Municipality,” in *The People of Puerto Rico: A Study in Social Anthropology*, by Julian Stewart et al., 171–264 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954).

¹¹⁷ See Michael Taussig, “History as Commodity: In Some Recent American (Anthropological) Literature,” *Critique of Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (1989): 7–23.

properly, Africa *is cut* and bleeds. The process of enslavement pierces Africa and extends it resulting in unintentional lines of flight, which go beyond what was believed to be the limit of Africa and Africanness.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, the second reason for beginning with enslavement is that it places us back into the abyss instead of eliding the abyss.

These reasons bring us to the theoretical underpinning of this chapter: the tying together and blurring of Black Atlantic studies and Black studies. In one sense, I want these two traditions to be in conversation with each other. In another, I want to see them entangled, as rhizomatically connected and already in conversation.

The brief history I trace here is meant to understand blackness in Loíza in part as the experience of Fanonian nonbeing. I develop this by connecting Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Patterson argues that instead of documenting enslavement via the labor of the enslaved, we should view enslavement through relationships.¹¹⁹ That is to say, the enslaved were contained via the threat of death, which the enslaver held over them. Should they "misbehave," they could face physical death. Along with this, Patterson argues that the enslaved experienced a *social* death through loss of self, what Patterson calls being "desocialized and depersonalized."¹²⁰ Enslavers would change names of the enslaved, change language, and change practices.¹²¹ Through this, the enslaved lost aspects of themselves. Thus, *social* death is distinct from physical death. Lastly, Patterson insists that enslavement was a societal affair, requiring a vast network of white laws and institutions to

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 19.

¹²⁰ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 38.

¹²¹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 52.

ensure individual enslavers could maintain their status.¹²² Adding to Patterson, Fanon offers us a *raison d'être* for this pattern of behavior among enslavers: Black people do not inherently have personhood, they exist in what he calls the “zone of nonbeing,”—the opposite of ontology. A realm wherein subjectivity is not possible. Bringing Patterson and Fanon together here is an example of what I mean by bringing Black Atlantic studies and Black studies together. As this dissertation shows, these two methods and theories influence each other and are refracted through each other.

I want to qualify my theorization of enslavement in Puerto Rico. By beginning with the history of enslavement in Puerto Rico, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only possible identity that is available to Black people in Loíza. Even Sharpe, who theorizes Black death, argues that Black death is not *tout-monde*. She writes that the wake can be worked such that we can “imagine otherwise from what we know *now* about slavery.”¹²³ Indeed, as I stated earlier, *la loca* offers a life, way of being, and a becoming that is beyond the limitations of containment and extends beyond departure. Therefore, I limn the death that Fanon and Patterson rightly theorize with the work of Sharpe and Sylvia Wynter, among others. To be clear, I am not setting up another dialectic. *La loca* shows us that the personhood which exists in the zone of nonbeing can be thought of as existing in the “demonic realm,” utterly unrecognizable by Euro-enlightenment standards of “subjectivity.”¹²⁴ Thus, *la loca* is not interested in subjectivity. Her personhood does not rely on being recognized. Indeed, her personhood is built on *not* being recognized. Thus, *la*

¹²² Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 66.

¹²³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 18; emphasis original.

¹²⁴ Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman,’” in *Out of Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 364.

loca's performance eschews subjectivity and instead revels in forms of being that are not yet settled and instead are more like "becomings"—potentialities and movements.

The question that remains for us is one that was best articulated by Saidiya Hartman (2008, 4): "How does one revisit the scene of subjugation without replicating the grammar of violence?"¹²⁵ To begin to think about an answer, I again turn to Glissant, who offers us conceptual resources in his turn on "creolization." He writes: "Western thought, although studying it as a historical phenomenon, persists in remaining silent about the potential of the slave trade for the process of creolization."¹²⁶ Western thought, Glissant says, limits the possibilities available to diaspora people by narrowly focusing on enslavement. It should be noted, though, that the possibility to which Glissant refers is not a narrow reading of the evil of the slave trade. Possibility, here, refers to the way that the enslaved themselves could take that which enslaves them and transform it for their own means. In the same place, he later gives the example of the Creole language: "...the slave takes possession of the language imposed by his master, a simplified language, adopted to the demands of his labor (a black pidgin) and makes this simplification ever more extreme. You wish to reduce me to childish babble, I will make this babble systematic, we shall see if you can make sense of it."¹²⁷ "Creolization," therefore, is not a simple mixture of difference. Moreover, it does not elide the terror of the slave trade with wishful ideas of "possibility" but instead centers the atrocity of the slave trade as that which makes possibility possible. "Creolization" is a process of maximizing possibility against all odds, of creating horizons where there were none before, creating horizons with apparently nothing but

¹²⁵ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 4.

¹²⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 14.

¹²⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 20.

darkness, horizons where new things can happen. The possibilities that both my research participants and I think with and about are ways of attending to the polyvocality of the abyss, which we will learn does not always speak in ways that we can understand. *We shall see if you can make sense of it.*

Enslavement in Puerto Rico

In 1510, the first enslaved Africans arrived in Puerto Rico, seven years after it was made legal in the Spanish colonies.¹²⁸ Over the nearly four centuries of enslavement on the island, approximately twenty-five thousand enslaved Africans arrived in Puerto Rico.¹²⁹ Once arrived, the enslaved were put to work where their Indigenous counterparts had previously worked and died: gold mines. Important to note, then, is that prior to the Spanish importation of enslaved Africans, Indigenous Taínos were forced to work in gold mines in places like Loíza and elsewhere on the island. In Puerto Rico, the “Rich Port,” once gold mines were exhausted and, with them, the Indigenous population, a new system of indentured labor was developed in the Spanish colony.

In the early decades of Spanish colonization, colonists used the *encomienda* system whereby they took control of Indigenous people and their lands and required those same people to pay tribute for their lands, as the lands were “granted” to them by the Spanish crown.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ David Stark, *Slave Families and the Hato Economy in Puerto Rico* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 21.

¹²⁹ David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 202. These numbers, however, should not be read as final numbers or even totals but rather a place to begin. These statistics reflect best known estimates based on embarkation and disembarkation information. They should not be read as a totalizing understanding of enslavement in Puerto Rico.

¹³⁰ See Lesley Byrd Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain: The Beginning of Spanish Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950).

Importantly, the *encomienda* system was not new to these colonists. Indeed, the *encomienda* system was first used over Moors in Spain and only later extended to the Americas.¹³¹ The Spanish colonists were extending the legendary promise of Santiago to new lands and people. In 1530, as gold mines were beginning their decline, historian of slavery in Puerto Rico Francisco Scarano estimates the Indigenous population as “510 Indians distributed as *encomendados* (given to a Spaniard for labor exaction), 1,043 enslaved Indians.”¹³² The *encomienda* system, however, was “ineffective, as many [Indigenous people] died or simply fled.”¹³³ As a result of two interrelated problems, gold mines running dry and lack of Taíno laborers, “colonizers were forced to modify their economy, initiating the cultivation of sugar cane. This phase of agriculture required a workforce that the indigenous population could not supply, and a new ethnic group—black Africans—were imported into the region.”¹³⁴ Thus ended the *encomienda* system of colonial extraction and enslavement in Puerto Rico.

Once gold mines were exhausted in the 1540s, agricultural cultivation became the primary site of forced labor and with it, sugar the main product developed by enslaved peoples.¹³⁵ This phase of colonial extraction was known as the *ingenio* system. By 1545, the

¹³¹ Barry D. Sell, “*encomienda*,” in *Latin American History and Culture: Encyclopedia of Pre-Colonial Latin America (Prehistory to 1550s)*, eds. J. Michael Francis, and Thomas M. Leonard (New York: Facts On File, 2017), accessed May 21, 2021, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/fofplaps/encomienda/0?institutionId=1724>.

¹³² Francisco A. Scarano, “Spanish Hispaniola and Puerto Rico,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, edited by Mark M. Smith and Robert Paquette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33. Note Scarano’s delineation between enslaved Taínos and those *encomendado* (“entrusted”) to Spanish colonists. This is because, technically, those who were *encomendado* worked under the consent of their Indigenous chief and were therefore not enslaved. See Zaragoza, *St. James in the Street*, 23.

¹³³ Stark, *Slave Families*, 20.

¹³⁴ Algeria, *La fiesta*, 2. This shift from mining to agrobusiness was subsistence farming. It was not until the later parts of the eighteenth century that Puerto Rico would grow sugarcane and other products for export. See Scarano, “Spanish Hispaniola,” 24.

¹³⁵ Stark, *Slave Families*, 21.

Spanish Crown was encouraging sugar production on the island through loans for building sugar mills (*ingenios*) and for the importation of enslaved Africans to work the cane.¹³⁶ As a result of incentivization of sugar production, there was a profound increase in the number of enslaved African imported to Puerto Rico. Historian David Stark notes: “The number of Africans purchased by island residents totaled 6,641 in the years 1540 through 1600.”¹³⁷ Whereas in 1530, Scarano estimated there were “2,284 enslaved Africans” in Puerto Rico.¹³⁸ To be clear: this turn to agriculture in the sixteenth century paled in comparison to the rate with which sugarcane would later be grown and cultivated through enslaved labor in other parts of the Black Atlantic. Still, this is a noticeable increase for a Spanish backward where “the Spanish Crown had offered land, but not ownership, to Spaniards willing to settle on the island. With the promise of wealth from gold mining gone, the high cost of importing the slaves needed for large-scale farming, frequent attacks by neighboring Caribe Indians, epidemics, and hurricanes, new settlers were discouraged from emigrating to the island.”¹³⁹

Over the next three centuries, as Puerto Rico developed further as a Spanish colony, more and more Spaniards settled there and continued to produce sugar using enslaved African labor under this ingenio system. At the height of the slave trade in Puerto Rico, the 1830–40s, the enslaved population hovered around 10 to 12 percent of the total population, or between 34,000 and 51,000 people.¹⁴⁰ For the same years, the Spanish population on the island was

¹³⁶ Stark, *Slave Families*, 21.

¹³⁷ Stark, *Slave Families*, 22.

¹³⁸ Scarano, “Spanish Hispaniola,” 33.

¹³⁹ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom*, 48.

approximately 50 to 53 percent of the population, between 162,000 and 216,000 people.¹⁴¹

Whites and free people of color, including “mulattoes” and free Black people make up the remaining, 38–40 percent of the population, between 100,000 and 154,000 people. This means that the majority of the people on the island from the 1840s onward were racially white. As we will see, however, Loíza will stand out in terms of its African population.

Loíza was one of a handful of cities in Puerto Rico in the middle of the sixteenth century to have an ingenio. As such, it was one of the handful of cities, along with Mayagüez in the west and Ponce to the south, to have a sizable enslaved population and Spanish population living together. After over two centuries of the ingenio system and with the rise of sugar consumption in Europe and elsewhere, historian of slavery in Puerto Rico Juan A. Giusti Cordero notes that by 1776, Loíza, while having largest enslaved population on the island, “was only the sixth largest producer of sugar.”¹⁴² Giusti Cordero goes on to argue that by 1828, due to the increasing cost to purchase and import enslaved people, plus Loíza’s decreasing size (as city limits get redrawn), the number of enslaved people in Loíza was half of what it was in the final decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁴³ This is all while the number of enslaved people was increasing in other parts of the island, as they did in Ponce and Mayagüez, for example. Moreover, while the enslaved population was decreasing in Loíza, the free Black population was increasing. In 1776, while 37 percent of the Black population was enslaved, approximately 31 percent of the population were free Black people. By 1818, the free Black population increased to 45

¹⁴¹ Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom*, 48.

¹⁴² Juan A. Giusti Cordero, “El País de Santiago: Ecología y Producción en la Región de Loíza, Siglos XVIII–XIX.” *Sargasso*, no. 2 (2006–7): 20. This is likely because Loíza had one of the smallest sectors dedicated to sugar production. Moreover, as Giusti Cordero himself says, other products were more important in the area. So, while sugar production is increasing in importance on the island, Loíza maintains its own agricultural hierarchy with yuca and *pan casaba* being more important than sugar. See Giusti Cordero, “El País de Santiago,” 21.

¹⁴³ Giusti Cordero, “El País de Santiago,” 20.

percent.¹⁴⁴ Loíza, therefore, continued to remain a predominantly Afro-Puerto Rican city even as inhumane economic systems changed. This is likely because, as Sidney Mintz argues, “the system of manumission of slaves was always relatively liberal so that the number of free men of color consistently exceeded the number of slaves.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, the enslaved found and made various routes through their containment. As a result, cities like Loíza became havens for Black people.

By the time anthropologist Ricardo Alegría arrived to conduct his research and groundbreaking study on la fiesta in the 1950s, he recorded that “more than 87 out of 100 [of the 7,740 recorded inhabitants] are of the black race and the majority of these are descendants of the older population who were concentrated in the region to work in the fertile fields.”¹⁴⁶ Unlike the island as a whole, Loíza in the 1950s was overwhelmingly afrodescendiente. The rest of the Black population would be those who fled enslavement in other parts of Puerto Rico, or the surrounding Caribbean islands, and who, according to legend, made their home as maroons in Las Cuevas, a series of huge open-air caves near Pueblo. While Puerto Rico never reached the mind-boggling enslavement numbers of Brazil or Cuba, it cannot be denied that enslavement played an important role in its agricultural, cultural, and economic development. As I show here in this all too brief summary of the history of enslavement in Loíza and Puerto Rico, enslavement was part and parcel to the construction of their economies and populations. As I will attend to below, enslavement was also part and parcel to the creation of la fiesta. This is Sharpe’s wake. The slaving vessels that carried Africans to Puerto Rico left traces of themselves in the water. Similarly, these ships have also left traces of themselves in the lives and practices of the

¹⁴⁴ Giusti Cordero, “El País de Santiago,” 21.

¹⁴⁵ Sidney Mintz, “Cañamelar: Rural Sugar Plantation Proletariat,” in *The People of Puerto Rico: A Study in Social Anthropology*, eds. Julian Stewart et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 409–410.

¹⁴⁶ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 7.

people of Loíza. This is especially important for understanding the multiple ways that Africa and Africanity come to be understood. That is, how enslavement, and its constituent parts, shaped particular views of blackness in Loíza.

“Negative Africanity”: Religion and Racialization

Leticia and I were on a supply run. She was looking for staple items for making *comida criolla*: platanos (and lots of them), pork shoulder for *pernil*, ground beef for empanadas, and various herbs and spices. She planned on cooking for her family in Medianía Alta. Because she now permanently lives in the United States, it is not often that she gets a chance to cook for her family. What more auspicious occasion than in the lead up to la fiesta? Unfortunately, there were no supermarkets big enough in Loíza where she could buy everything she wanted. The few places to buy food in Loíza were *farmacias*, which range from small corner shops to large bodega-style catchall convenience stores. She had to head out of town to get everything she needed in the quantity she needed it. “Want to come?” she asked me. I had offered my albeit limited help in cooking and preparation. More than anything, I thought, she wanted an assistant whom she could direct to fetch her items as she thought of them.

I met Leticia by chance through Mónica. Mónica can be what people in Puerto Rico call “*presentao*.” She is socially assertive, bold, and uninhibited. Sometimes *presentao* is used in a negative sense and means someone who is nosy; at other times, when used jokingly, it means nosy—but not intended rudely, more playful. On one occasion, after Mass, Mónica took me by the hand and introduced me to Leticia. She was being helpful, of course; but she was being *presentao*. While I wanted to meet people “organically” (whatever that could mean in ethnographic research), Mónica had something else in mind. Now, thinking back on this from

my present moment shaped by COVID-19 research limitations, having an informal, presentao “research assistant” like Mónica was more helpful than I thought at the time.

Leticia was a Loiceña in her mid-60s when I met her in July 2019. She is from Loíza but moved to the United States in 1983 just before her first daughter was born. Her wrinkles and hunched back betrayed how young she really was. When we met, I asked her to tell me about herself and she immediately began with how hard she has worked all her life. “My parents expected so much of me and my sisters,” she told me. “As we got older, we had more and more responsibilities at home, like cooking and cleaning. Sometimes I feel like I never got a childhood.” Leticia was more reserved than Mónica (read: less presentao) but just as opinionated. At the time, she lived in New York City and was a pharmacy technician, something she trained to be while she lived in Puerto Rico.¹⁴⁷

Mónica has known Leticia’s family in Loíza for quite a while and thought Leticia and I could bond over living in the US and living in New York (where Mónica thought I still lived). I told her a bit about what I study, why I was in Loíza, and about how she might help in my research. I agreed to meet up with Leticia later to spend some time with her and her family.

When I met up with her on Friday afternoon, we were headed from Las Carreras (not far from el palo), a small area of Medianía Alta where her family lives, to Río Grande in order to shop for her list at Econo, which is a large supermarket chain on the island. Her small two-door Honda Civic sat close to the ground, which made it all the more susceptible to the island’s notorious potholes. As she got in, she groaned. Once inside, she took a moment to settle herself before turning the key in the ignition. It was a borrowed car whose exterior showed age but

¹⁴⁷ As a consequence of its annexation to the United States, Puerto Rico has become one of the world’s leading pharmaceutical manufacturers. See Alexa S. Dietrich, *The Drug Company Next Door: Pollution, Jobs, and Community Health in Puerto Rico* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

whose interior was well-organized and clean. She told me her mother used it to drive to church and the supermarket, “y ya.” At each pothole, she slowed to a snail’s pace, moved onto the shoulder or, worse, into the oncoming traffic’s lane to avoid falling into them. The potholes in Puerto Rico are known to swallow cars whole. Recently, an edited picture circulated on Twitter of a Jaws-like shark jumping out of a pothole in Ponce. “¡Coño! ¡Por poco rompimos los cuernos!” she yelled. A near miss with oncoming traffic as she swerved in a last-minute effort to miss a pothole.

As she slowed down to avoid another pot hole, we passed a Black woman dressed in white, including a white headscarf, going into an unmarked building. (Not unlike the woman in Figure 3.3) All Leticia needed to see was her white clothing: “See,” she says, “santeras are everywhere.” ¿Ves? Her “see” referencing nothing and everything. “See,” as in, “I told you so.” “See” as in, “you study religion, this should be interesting for you.” Up to this point, we had not been discussing Santería or santeras or anything in particular, really. For Leticia, though, “religion” was everywhere.

While I knew white clothing was used by *regla de ocha* practitioners,¹⁴⁸ I did not immediately make the association Leticia did. In the moment just after Leticia offered this, and as we continued on our way to Río Grande, I thought of one of the many things which that woman could have been doing. Given the time of year and our location (near Loíza), I thought the woman could have been dressed like that because: she simply was wearing white; she could be off to work or just off from her shift at Raíces (a popular restaurant where the women’s

¹⁴⁸ “Regla de ocha” goes by different names in different places. Each designation has its own history and context and reason for existing and reason for usage. While I do not use “Santería” to describe ocha, I realize that some practitioners use this language. My usage in this chapter switches between *regla de ocha* (my preferred designation) and the usage of the person or text I am in conversation with, be it “Santería,” “regla de ocha,” or “Lucumí,” and so on.

uniform is the exact thing she was wearing); or she could be a *bomba* dancer who was getting ready for a bomba performance. Interested in how Leticia made the connection so easily, I asked: “What makes you say that?” She momentarily took her hands off the steering wheel and crossed them in her lap and gave me a look like *Aren't you the expert? Shouldn't you know?* She asked very pointedly, “Do you know what Santería is?” I laughed awkwardly: “Yes, I know what it is but I am interested in how you know so much about this woman.” My response implicitly questioning her judgment.

“Oh yeah? What is it, then?” She was testing me, I thought. Her question back to me suggested that she did not like being on the defense. My question was meant to probe not provoke, a subtle art that I needed to learn. The conversation had shifted slightly: from a conversation about this one woman to an explanation of an African-inspired religious practices all on the way to a supermarket. I thought for a moment about what to say. Her “¿Ves?” implied and tried to force an agreed upon foundation for this part of the conversation. It implied that she thought we would agree about this woman and her religious practices. This, plus her “What is it, then?” question, made it clear she had something in mind and was testing to see if my definition would correspond. I had never been asked this before and I wanted to get it right. However, I did not know what to say. I defaulted to a rote explanation of the transatlantic slave trade, the movement of West Africans to the Americas, and the proliferation of Yoruba traditions in the Americas, and to their eventual mixture with Catholicism and encapsulation in “Santería.” In retrospect, it was probably too long of a response and overly “academic.” She was unsatisfied with my explanation. “Santería is witchcraft,” she said matter-of-factly as she shook her head no. “They work with demonic spirits.” I decided it would be best to hear about her logic rather than to get into a discussion about the nuances between witchcraft, Santería, and demonic

assistantship (not that these are mutually exclusive). I asked her to explain more fully what she meant. She said:

Look, in this area, Santería is very popular. You see people all around here wearing necklaces, and wearing white, and all that. Well, all of that stuff comes from Africa. In Africa, people worship nature and believe in multiple gods. When they came here, they brought all of that with them, all kinds of magic and witchcraft; demonic stuff. They mixed that with Catholicism and now we have Santería.

Her own explanation was not that far off from mine, I thought. The main difference was our systems of valuation. Her valuation of Santería read it through Africanity, and for her, Africanity was a negatively charged religious practice.

Leticia is not alone in her negative evaluation of ocha. Indeed, since the 1950s push for “modernization” by the Muñoz Marín administration, African-inspired religions were folkloricized.¹⁴⁹ That is, African-inspired practices on the island were seen as “backwards” and as inhibitors to progress vis-à-vis Americanization and thus were recast as in places like Loíza where they could be contained and commodified. This, coupled with Pentecostal and evangelical missionization in Puerto Rico, has significantly changed perceptions of ocha on the island. In Loíza, Samiri Hernández Hiraldo has written about perceptions of non-Christian practices in terms of “witchcraft.” She writes that “witchcraft” is a term used “by Christians and non-Christians as a generic term for any non-Catholic or non-Protestant religious practice as something anti-Christian, evil, or Satanic.”¹⁵⁰ This is not unlike what Raquel Romberg found in her work on *brujería* in Loíza. In Romberg’s research, *brujos* were reluctant to have their craft associated with Africanity and quickly moved conversations on from questions regarding

¹⁴⁹ Reinaldo Roman, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

¹⁵⁰ Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity*, 28.

African inspiration.¹⁵¹ For Leticia and others, Africanity, in terms of practices or rituals, is negatively charged and should be avoided. In Leticia, we encounter the thesis of the dialectical movement between containment and departure. This appraisal of Africanity attempts to contain Africanity through negation. As we will see later, though, negation has unintended consequences. For now, the negation is not about destroying the Other but about producing them under the thesis: negative Africanity.

Santiago and Negative Africanity

Leticia's attitude has a long history in Puerto Rico, as well as other parts of the Caribbean. On the one hand, the ground work for Spanish anti-African sentiments were laid with the transatlantic slave trade, which was briefly documented earlier. In this section, though, I document the entanglement of anti-Africanity as ethno-racialization and religiosity as it was made manifest in la fiesta through one of the traditional festival characters: el caballero.

If Santiago, in the Spanish legend, is a viceroy standing in for Jesus Christ, el caballero is a viceroy for Santiago. His costume is not unlike the image of Santiago found in Medianía Alta (Figure 2.4 and 2.5). Like the miraculous image, he is white and mustachioed. Note the irony here of Black Puerto Ricans masking themselves as white Spaniards. Costumes, though, complete the likeness by giving him blue eyes and a large Spanish-style hat, with large feather plume (Figure 3.1). They are supremely dazzling and colorful, especially when the small mirrors

¹⁵¹ Romberg noted how a brujo named Tonio, when asked about the African elements of his practice, deflected immediately and denied any filiation with Africanity. From their exchange, Romberg could sense “that he does not want to be associated with anything related to Africanness, especially to slavery in Puerto Rico.” See Raquel Romberg, *Healing Dramas: Divination and Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 16. Important to note here is that her question (presumably in Spanish) was: “What are the African aspects of what you do?” In Spanish, this would be “¿Cuáles son los aspectos africanos de lo que haces?” The “cuáles” making the sentence something more like, “Which are the African aspects of what you do?” The implication here is that there *are* African elements and she wants him to name them. There is a presumption in the question which might explain why he deflected so quickly.

and sequins attached to them catch the light of the sun. Alegría, in his documentary film on la fiesta from 1949, noted that the costumes were designed to “imitate the vestments of ancient Spanish knights.”¹⁵² Later, in his ethnography, Alegría added that el caballero “represents good in the struggle against evil.”¹⁵³ Ungerleider Kepler extended Alegría’s argument further when he added that the struggle between good and evil is a struggle of: “Christianity against paganism (Santiago stepping on the head of a Moor or infidel).”¹⁵⁴ In el caballero, then, we have the founding myth of la fiesta continued through costuming.



Figure 3.1 El caballero inside La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol. Notice el vejigante in the background of the image. Photo by author.

¹⁵² Ricardo E. Alegría, dir., *La Fiesta de Santiago, Loíza Aldea 1949* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: El Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico).

¹⁵³ Alegría, *La fiesta*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 66.

The Spanish colonists that el caballero imitates framed themselves in distinction to their African counterparts in Puerto Rico. In 1782, for example, a Spanish priest named Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra succinctly summarized this juxtaposition when he stated that there is “nothing more ignominious than being a black or descended from them.”¹⁵⁵ To be Black is to be coded negatively. Statements like this are an example of the anti-African and anti-Black environment of Spanish colonial Puerto Rico. Moreover, the ignominy that Abbad y Lasierra expressed had pervasive effects on the Black community in Puerto Rico. On the one hand, is the Spanish anti-blackness already expressed. On the other hand, such sentiments lead Black Puerto Ricans to adopt anti-Black self-perceptions thereby eschewing connections with Africanity through racial mixing with whites.

These self-destructive efforts to eradicate Africanity came in many forms. For example, in the play *Vejigantes* by Francisco Arriví, Toña, Marta’s mother, uses a handkerchief to cover her in an effort to hide her blackness. In hiding her own blackness, Toña hopes she could better Marta’s chances of marrying a white man named Bill.¹⁵⁶ Toña’s attitude toward her own blackness and her effort to set up her daughter for a marriage to a white man exemplify what became known as “*blancqueamiento*,” or “whitening.” These were efforts to whiten by proxy. That is, by marriage and child birth, one could augment their own social stratification. Phrases like “*mejorar la raza*” (“improve the race” by marrying white) or “*pelo malo*” (“bad hair,” referring to tightly curled hair) are part of the everyday lexicon in Loíza and in Puerto Rico. It is

¹⁵⁵ Jay Kinsbruner, *Not of Pure Blood: The Free People of Color and Racial Prejudice in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 19.

¹⁵⁶ Francisco Arriví, *Vejigantes: Drama en Tres Actos* (San Juan, PR: Editorial Cultural, 2012).

not unsurprising, then, that for a city that would otherwise read as phenotypically Black, the majority of the population do not mark themselves as Black in government census forms.¹⁵⁷

Coupled with these Spanish anti-African sentiments and internalized anti-Black sentiments were more recent US-sponsored campaigns to “modernize” the island’s inhabitants through the construction of a generalizable Puerto Rican. When the US invaded Puerto Rico on July 25, 1898, on the feast day of Santiago, no less, it found a country they assumed had no national identity, which they understood to mean that Puerto Ricans were ungovernable and unfit to govern themselves. The US deemed Puerto Ricans to be *locas*, non-identical and ungovernable. Thus, what the US determined that Puerto Rico needed in order for the US to govern them was a national identity. However, this imposed identity did not arrive for some time. Important to note is that it was not until 1947 that Puerto Ricans had the right to vote for their own governors. Prior to this, governors were imposed by Spanish colonist and, eventually, US colonizers. It was not until 1949, under the leadership of newly-elected governor Luis Muñoz Marín, who tried to more fully Americanize Puerto Rico through efforts to make the island a state, that a national identity for Puerto Rico was galvanized: *el jíbaro*. Under Muñoz Marín, “the [Puerto Rican] government first made a concerted effort to define an official cultural policy and stipulate what could rightfully represent Puerto Rican culture.”¹⁵⁸ In *el jíbaro*, the Muñoz Marín administration found the perfect assimilable, modern Puerto Rico. *El jíbaro* was the appropriately Catholic, light-skinned, hardworking, peasant-farmer.¹⁵⁹ This was supposedly a way of embracing the three roots of Puerto Rican ancestry in one national identity all at once: the

¹⁵⁷ Natasha S. Alford, “Why Some Black Puerto Ricans Choose ‘White’ on the Census,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/09/us/puerto-rico-census-black-race.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Arlene Dávila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 9.

¹⁵⁹ Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity*, 9.

African, European, and Indigenous no matter your racialization, especially as the combination was lightened. Puerto Rico was not one or the other but all three at once—lightened. El jíbaro was the quintessential Puerto Rico. This unified national identity was cast in contrast to the African, who is backwards, premodern, and un-American. The creation of this national identity was a means by which Puerto Rico was lightened, if not whitened, if not quite made white. That el jíbaro was the encapsulation of three racializations in one was meant to signal that the island had moved beyond race (and Black-blackness, or African-like blackness) and was ready to enter into the twentieth century as a race-neutral, white-like productive citizen. Part of the move also meant Puerto Ricans had to eschew anything that was deemed not modern, including non-Christian religions and religious practices that were more tightly scrutinized, as Leticia signaled in our car journey to Río Grande.

One of the principal ways that modernity and non-modernity gets coded in Loíza is through its designation as “Loíza Aldea,” or “the village of Loíza,” giving the city and residents a particular feel, like a city stuck in time, a place that encapsulates a simpler time, perhaps. Alegría opens his documentary with wide, sweeping vistas of the beaches of Loíza. Over the footage of people on makeshift boats coming ashore, the narrator begins: “one of the first places settled by Spanish conquistadors, Loíza is a town forgotten and left behind by the equalizing progress of mechanized civilization. Isolated from centralized communication, they live their gentle and tranquil lives, maintaining their ancient beliefs and customs, ignoring the passage of time.”¹⁶⁰ Alegría describes Loíza, in 1949, as a nineteenth century explorer might describe a “lost tribe.” Some attribute the slow industrialization of the city, what Alegría notes as lack of telecommunications and urban infrastructure, to the fact that for centuries there was only one

¹⁶⁰ Alegría, dir., *La Fiesta de Santiago, Loíza Aldea 1949*.

road in the city, calle 187. As a result, businesses were weary of setting up shop here and thus it felt disconnected from the rest of the island.¹⁶¹

This “Aldeazation,” however, of Loíza is also a means of containing Africanity. That is, in keeping Loíza an Aldea, there is a preservation of the past but it is kept “over there.” This is the folkloric blackness to which Rivera-Rideau referred. This form of blackness is palatable only insofar as it is kept within the bounds of folklore and tradition. Moreover, this folkloric blackness can be turned for profit. Loíza, “Capital of Tradition,” welcomes hundreds of tourists each year to watch the procession of the images of Santiago along calle 187. Africanity gets negated but not destroyed. Africanity is maintained—to a certain extent—in Loíza through la fiesta. La fiesta and Loíza perform premodernity via Aldeazation in a safe environment where one knows that this is not the “norm.” That outside of Loíza, outside of la fiesta, there is a norm wherein Africanity was moved beyond. That outside of Loíza, a modern and industrialized Puerto Rico exists.

Others attribute the “Aldea” feel to the fact that Loíza is full of “simple, humble people, who do not require much,” according to Mónica. This is something Mónica repeated often to me as I talked with her about why she chose to live so close to Loíza (in Río Grande, just past the Río Herrera that divides the two cities) but not quite in Loíza. Leticia, for example, uses the term with affection. “*De cariño*,” she says. She says it “out of love.” The way she speaks of Loíza, *de cariño*, at once sounds paternalistic and sincerely affectionate, like an older sibling. Still, “Loíza Aldea,” is used as means of subordinating Loíza to the speaker. Other cities are not given the designation “Aldea,” for example. However, Loíza is made into a village where, as Alegría’s narrator stated: the city and the residents ignore the passage of time. The subjectification of

¹⁶¹ Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity*, 67.

Loíza via Aldeazation is a means of maintaining distance and containing Africanity, even positive forms of it. Anthropologist Samiri Hernández Hiraldo notes that residents took issue with this designation saying that it comes off as calling them “primitive or backward.”¹⁶² Loiceños understand the designation that is applied to them as criticism indicating that they have not yet advanced to the stage of modernity the rest of the island has. No matter where on the spectrum between paternalism and primitivism, the designation “village” leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Whatever the usage, the label imbues Loíza and Loiceños with the need to advance, either beyond their primitive ways or their ignorant ways.

Taken together, Leticia’s comment on African-inspired religion makes sense within this context wherein Black Puerto Ricans and their associated practices were despised. As a result of the complex mixture of Spanish and US colonialism, Africanity in Puerto Rico is coded in religio-racialized terms. Through my conversations with Leticia, I found that “Africa” when inflected with religious overtones comes off as something that is demonic and pre-modern. As a result, some Loiceños, like Leticia, attempted to distance themselves from Africanity. There is something about it which transgresses societal notions of appropriateness. Moreover, the African “subject” must be limited. This limited possibility I tie back to enslavement whereby enslavers attempted to moderate and define subjectivity through comportment. Containment, however, is never totalizing. Containment is in relation to departure and movement.

¹⁶² Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity*, 47.



Figure 3.2 and 3.3 Batey de los Hermanos Ayala. On the posts of the museum-shop (left) are vejigante masks. On the right, a woodcut of bomba dancer mid-pose. Photos by author.

“Positive Africanity”: Ethnicity and Music

There are unintended consequences in containing Africanity. By containing “it” on a ship, in the barracks, or on plantations, Africanity inevitably spreads through lines of flight, even if slowly. Recall Glissant: departure marks opportunity. Specifically, opportunity to find new ways of being in the world. It is an opportunity to live as a multiplicity. This is not a glib opportunity that evades the terror of slavery; this is opportunity borne in the very heart of enslavement, the abyss. Ultimately, what enslavers did not and could not anticipate occurred: Africanity proliferated well beyond their intended containment of it. The enslaver’s containment was meant to limit subjectivity and create objects of people. However, through la fiesta and music, the descendants of enslaved Africans have embodied new subjectivities that could not have been anticipated.

In Loíza, as in other parts of Puerto Rico, there is a growing group of Afro-Puerto Ricans who see “Africanity” as something that needs to be recovered from negative valuations. They, therefore, acknowledge the negative Africanity of Leticia and others eschewing its finality. Leticia, above, acknowledged Africanity but wanted to distance herself from it. For her,

Africanity was religious, evil. For those that affirm Africanity, it is not a sign of religious craft but an ethnic signifier. Like Leticia, though, “Africa” is imagined in vague terms. Leticia was not concerned with the history of the movement of West Africans to the Americas and how those specific ethnic groups and their Creole descendants created and shaped what came to be known as “Santería.” Similarly, this “positive Africanity” does not try to trace roots/routes back to Africa, claiming Yoruba heritage, for example. Instead, “Africa,” in this positive sense, worked to signify cultural practices rooted in one’s ethnic ancestry, understood as different than (but related to) one’s race.

With the festivities just days away, Loíza was abuzz with activity. In Pueblo, a huge elevated stage was being constructed near La Parroquia del Espíritu Santo y San Patricio. There, bands like El Gran Combo, one of Puerto Rico’s most famous salsa bands, would perform for free. People from all over the island would come just to see these musical performances. To the east, in Medianía Alta, another stage was being constructed. At Batey de los Hermanos Ayala, Raúl and his sister Raquel were preparing their home to host bomba and *plena* (another African-inspired musical style) performances called *bombazos*. Bomba and plena, Loiceños liked to say, were quintessential Loiceño musical traditions. They often added that these musical traditions were the ones Africans brought with them when they came to Puerto Rico. Raúl was setting up his own stage, albeit simpler than the one in Pueblo. His “stage” was the ground just in front of his home and just next to his museum-shop. A *batey* was traditionally a small communal area shared by neighbors for small gatherings. The Ayala’s batey continues this tradition by hosting events in their modest front yard. There they would host dozens, mostly residents of Loíza. They played music, danced, sang, and celebrated their African heritage.

During one conversation as I toured their museum-shop, Raquel told me how la fiesta brings together various elements of African life and culture that need to be safeguarded, especially by younger generations. She was frank: she won't be around forever and others need to take up the techniques and practices she and her family have helped to preserve. Luckily enough, she was part of a ballet organization that sought to do just that. Still, though, she wanted to see more young people exploring and embracing their African heritage. Many young people, she laments, do not know their history.¹⁶³ "They come and enjoy the food and music [during la fiesta] but do not know where they come from," she says. For her, la fiesta is an opportunity for Loiceños to proudly display their ethnicity and heritage. However, she wishes it were something that could be appreciated and celebrated year-round. For the moment, she says she is happy enough seeing how la fiesta creates a space wherein Africanity can be nourished. Specifically, el vejigante, she said, epitomizes Africanity. Here she connected el vejigante with the history covered in chapter one. "Historically," she said, "el vejigante is against Santiago and los caballeros, they were enemies."

During la fiesta, el vejigante was a large, colorful bat-like character whose horned face was meant to inspire fear. Max Harris described them in this way: "The *vejigantes* are the most colorful of the festival's processional characters. Describing themselves as *diablitos* (little devils), they wear loose-fitting, multi-colored body suits that reveal, when the wearer raises his arms, an arc of translucent material that connects sleeve to side like bat wings. Their faces are

¹⁶³ This is part of the problem explored by Godreau et al.: the ways that schools teach the history of Africans and African-descended people in Puerto Rico leaves much to be desired. Specifically, they argued that "schools and schooling practices in Puerto Rico [were] fertile ground for exploring state-sponsored representations of slavery and the implications of such representations for early socialization processes into nationalist ideology of race mixture, and blanqueamiento." See Godreau et al., "The Lessons of Slavery: Discourses of Slavery, Mestizaje, and Blanqueamiento in an Elementary School in Puerto Rico," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 1 (2008): 116.

hidden behind elaborate masks, most of which are carved from coconut shells and given exaggeratedly African features such as flattened noses and thick lips.”¹⁶⁴

The costume, though, has a longer history, as Raquel indicated. El vejigante was a figure already used during the religious processions of *Corpus Christi* in Spain. However, just like Santiago’s identity, associated practices, and imagery changed in Puerto Rico, el vejigante morphed to fit into the new context. As Santiago shifted to become the protector, the vejigante shifted from generalized “demonic” Other to a personification of Africity.



Figure 3.4 and 3.5 El vejigante inside La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol. On the right, note the faux “vejiga” (“bladder”) at the end of a small stick in his right hand, his presumed namesake. Photos by author.

Ungerleider Kepler notes the similarities between the figure from Spanish history and from contemporary Puerto Rico. He writes: “The use of the vejigante as a carnivalesque personality dates to the times when the Spanish would celebrate the Catholic feast of *Corpus*

¹⁶⁴ Harris, *Carnival*, 39; italics original. Harris picks up on this language of “diablitos” from Fernando Ortiz, who wrote the prologue for Alegría’s ethnography. Ortiz argued that diablitos were Spanish counterparts to Christian imagery used during Spanish feasts and celebration. See Fernando Ortiz, “Los ‘Diablitos’ Negros de Puerto Rico,” prologue to *La Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol en Loíza Aldea*, by Ricardo E. Alegría (San Juan: Colección de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1954), xiv.

Christi with a street procession wherein some men would mask themselves in horned masks and dress in red and black. These representations of the devil would open the passageway for the procession by hitting (without hurting) the crowd with dried and inflated bladders [“*vejigas*”].”¹⁶⁵ Ungerleider Kepler’s work relied on etymological connections between Spain and the Spanish colonies. He wrote: “the lexicographer Augusto Malaret shows in his work *Vocabulario de Puerto Rico*, ‘what the Europeans calls demons, in this island they are called *bebigantes*.’ That is, *vejigante* is a creole and mulata Puerto Rican word that describes ‘the giant with the bladder,’ because they are dressed as demons look larger than the common person and because they carry with them a cow’s bladder filled with air, with which to hit and scare the crowds during the celebration.”¹⁶⁶ Though a helpful link to the Spanish festival of *Corpus Christi*, Lowell Fiet argues that the deployment of the “*vejigante*” should be considered in the context of Puerto Rico alone instead of linking backwards to Spain. He argued: “instead of possible etymological roots, the origin of the word *vejigante* in Loíza appears to be an act of the colonial Spaniards naming African forms of expression in their own understanding and vocabulary.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, “*vejigante*” should instead be understood as the Spanish colonial way of describing Africanity in Loíza.

However, as the Ayala family museum-shop makes clear, *el vejigante* had transformed. In this instance, though, *el vejigante* was no longer the negatively charged African Other. Instead, *el vejigante* is a symbol of cultural pride as his ubiquity in murals, business windows, and paintings throughout the city makes clear. You cannot go very far without seeing his masks,

¹⁶⁵ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Ungerleider Kepler, *Las fiestas*, 67.

¹⁶⁷ Fiet, *Caballeros, vejigantes, locas y viejos*, 116.

either made of coconut or as graffiti-esque murals, in Loíza. More than normalize, though, his ubiquity has made him synonymous with positive understandings of Africanity, as Raquel indicated. Africanity referring to the music, dance, celebrations, and food that come as a result of African migration that la fiesta embodies. Using el vejigante, Loiceños recharge Africanity positively. Regarding this shift, Hernández Hiraldo wrote: “In spite of the fact that *vejigante* represents the evil force that Santiago has to fight against, it has become representative of the festival and a national and international symbol” for la fiesta.¹⁶⁸

As a representative of la fiesta and as a symbol of this positive and affirmative Africanity, el vejigante illustrates the ways that Loiceños like Raquel and Raúl work to transform symbols that were once meant to disparage and into embodiments of community pride. Raquel had an intimate knowledge of la fiesta. But she was very casual about it all. People knew her and her family well and they are well-respected community members in Loíza. As people walked down calle 187, they called out from the sidewalk: “¡Hola, Ayala!” to no one specific. Both Raquel and Raúl would look up and greet whoever it was. Sometimes they knew the person, at other times they did not. We were inside the one room museum-shop located just off calle 187 (Figure 3.2). Raquel was outside, leaning against a window as we talked. She told me about her family and their history with la fiesta. Her father was the famous Loíza mask-maker, Castor Ayala (1911–1980). He travelled all over the world, she told me, to give presentations on mask-making, Loíza, and Africanity in Loíza. Famous people from all over have his masks in their homes, she said very proudly. She and her brother have continued the proud family tradition of mask-making and have themselves become famous artisans. Castor Ayala’s talents did not end with mask-making, though. He was also founder of the bomba group Ballet Folklorico Hermanos

¹⁶⁸ Hernández Hiraldo, *Black Puerto Rican Identity*, 47; italics original.

Ayala, the Ayala Brothers Folkloric Ballet ensemble. The musical group released a few studio albums, which were also on sale in the museum-shop. The cover art for their 2008 album, *Bomba de Loíza*, is a painting of their batey by famous Loiceño artist Samuel Lind. In the foreground are bomba dancers and drummers. In the background are el vejigante and el caballero. The combination of music, la fiesta, and the various characters in la fiesta demonstrates how the Ayalas are connecting all kinds of threads in their musical craft and how they connect the Africanity of their music with la fiesta.

Bomba, Raquel told me, is a uniquely Puerto Rican style of music that combines drumming, dancing, and singing. Leticia told me separately that it is a style of music that Africans brought with them to Puerto Rico. Lyrics are simple and done in call and response style. The lyrics themselves are a form of storytelling and oral tradition. They record daily life for the people of Loíza. When bomba is danced it is unlike other forms of dance, where the music dictates the dance; in bomba the dancer dictates the music. It is a competition between dancer and drummer, to see if the drummer can keep up with the dancer. Like Leticia asking me about ocha “What is it, then?” the dancer asks the drummer, “Can you keep up?” It is a friendly competition and testing. The Ayala’s Ballet is famous, has traveled the world, and offered classes and workshops in and around Loíza on bomba drumming, dance, and lyrics. Even though he died in 1980, Castor Ayala is still affectionately called “Don Castor” by many residents. Inside the museum-shop, as they called it, you can see pictures of him all over the walls. There were newspaper notices about him and his craft, making vejigante masks from coconut husks. They had several coconuts lined up on a shelf, showing the process of clearing out the coconut, making the face hole for the wearer, and making the “face” of the mask. There were certificates recognizing Don Castor for his work as an artisan maker and musician. After the death of her

father, Raquel and her brother Raúl took up co-leadership of the Ballet. They have become the next generation of hermanos Ayala. They have continued the traditions of bomba and la fiesta, and have thus extended Africanity.

Interestingly, Loiceños like Leticia, who framed Africanity negatively vis-à-vis its religiosity, were happy to participate and celebrate ethnic Africanity vis-à-vis la fiesta. Leticia herself told me of the African origins of bomba when we met by coincidence at the Ayala batey during a bombazo. She wanted to buy artwork from renowned Loiceño artist Samuel Lind, whose studio is just down the road from the batey; unfortunately for her, the studio was closed. She came to the museum-shop to see if she could find some souvenirs to bring back with her for her family. The majority of Lind's artwork is set in Loíza, and depicts people dancing, drumming, and singing bomba, just as in the cover art for the Ayala's album mentioned above. Leticia is proud of her blackness, she said, and she thinks that Lind's artwork is one way for her to display that in her home and in the homes of her children. Even for Leticia, then, Africanity was flexible. Even in the hands of someone who wanted to limit what Africanity can be by accenting it as repulsive, we find that Africanity is too attractive to be totally negated.

The next generation of los hermanos Ayala and even Leticia, illustrate the way that containment, the literal packing of people onto ships, spread the very thing slavers meant to contain. Both Raúl and Raquel continue this work through bomba, the uniquely Puerto Rican form of African-inspired music. Important to note here is that their musical stylings, as evidenced by their own studio albums, reveal the closeness of la fiesta and bomba. Raúl, specifically, continues this tradition through his mask-making. For each of them, though, the importance of continuing to celebrate their African traditions keeps them going. Enslavement, which by intent sought to limit the personhood of Africans, inadvertently did quite the opposite.

As the enslaved found new ways of defining themselves, African personhoods proliferated throughout the Americas. In the case of Loíza, the containment of Africanity meant the proliferation of music and festival celebrations. The unintended consequence of enslavement is a celebration of blackness. Through art, mask-making, music, and dance, Africanity is redeemed from what would ostensibly be irredeemable: evil. Like el vejigante, Africanity, through a mixture of ubiquity and skilled craft, that which is evil is turned into good, what is repulsive becomes attractive. The affirmation of Africanity nurtures the possibility of proliferation.

Madness: Beyond Affirmation and Negation

What I have traced thus far has been the impossibility and possibility of personhood in the wake of the Middle Passage. In this last section, I return to la loca. La loca, as our guide to Africanity, insists on other ways of being. In chapter one, she told us of the excessive and contradictory histories of la fiesta. Here, la loca turns our attention to possibilities outside of the dialectic. Outside of the dialectic lies a realm of possibilities that confound the order of things because they are incongruent with logics of subjectivity. Given that the possibilities of la loca's way of being in the world do not align with the dialectical movement of affirmation and negation, they confound logic inasmuch as they speak in a language we do not yet understand and are heard as gibberish. They babble (like Glissant's Creole), speak nonsense, and are ultimately, inane. *We shall see if you can make sense of it.*

Here, I turn to Sylvia Wynter's anthropology. She interrogates the two aforementioned subjectivities I have summarized here, the limited and the prolific, and finds them wanting. She is unsatisfied with the *logic* of both of them. The problem with both of them, for her, is that they rely, explicitly or implicitly, on the logics of colonialism. For her, it is important to move beyond

politics of recognition implicit in affirmation and negation. To be recognized is to be contained. It is to be caught in a dialectical movement between being unrecognized and desiring recognition—even by that which refuses to see.¹⁶⁹ To be seen by the unseer, though, is to be re-contained, to be valued in terms of the “thesis,” the negative valuation above. Here, *la loca* re-enters the frame. She had been off wandering somewhere, begging for money, sweeping people’s porches, drinking, laughing, and dancing. Like *el vejigante* and *el caballero* in the cover art for *Bomba en Loíza*, she stood in the background, watching, waiting for her opportunity. She makes her way here, broom in hand, ready to cause more trouble.

In Wynter’s reading of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and one of its central figures, Caliban, we are confronted with the problem of colonial logics, which Wynter says are at play in both limited and excessive subjectivities, in both containment and departure.¹⁷⁰ While it might seem obvious how colonial logic makes its way into limited subjectivity, it is less obvious how Wynter reads coloniality into proliferation. For her, any attempt to articulate oneself within the colonial system of knowledge or being is always already subsumed by that same system. The place where slaving ships, full of human cargo, were headed to was occupied, colonial land. Any form of subjectivity that seeks recognition in the terms of that land is colonial. Rather than attempt to recover the human from the thesis, Wynter argues that Black women, like *la loca*, exist within the “demonic.” Through a reading of *The Tempest*, she indexes the several forms of personhood seemingly available, what I have called positive and negative subjectivities, and finds that Black women could not be imagined within that dialectic. She uses “demonic” to open systems where outcomes are unknown and perhaps even unknowable.

¹⁶⁹ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 366.

¹⁷⁰ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 356.

In *The Tempest*, the once Duke of Milan, Prospero, finds himself banished to an unknown island, along with his daughter Miranda. On the island, Prospero encounters a “monster” named Caliban. Along the way, Prospero enslaves Caliban and, in exchange for labor, Prospero says he will teach Caliban to speak. This relationship between Prospero and Caliban is where Wynter makes her critique. For Prospero, Caliban is unable to speak, think, or theorize in ways outside “the gift” of his teaching. His speech hitherto had been nonsense. It was not recognizable. Similarly, in the colonial logic: one is not without reference to the dialectic. In other words, you either are the thesis or the antithesis, you are either subject or object. Instead of looking for ways to articulate themselves in or around colonial logic, Wynter argues that Black people, and Black women, in particular, possess a unique possibility in their ability to refuse dialectical logic. That is, to refuse the question of subjectivity. Borrowing from physics, Wynter calls this “demonic” and the site from which this mode of being manifests “demonic grounds.” Both of these refer to a mode of being that is infinitely open, without relation to subjectivity. It is a space that we cannot even begin to imagine in meaningful ways. She writes:

...we shall need to move beyond the founding definition, not merely *another* alternative one, non-consciously put in place as our present definition, but rather to a frame of reference which parallels “demonic models” posited by physicists who seek to conceive of a vantage point outside the space-time orientation of the homuncular observer. This would be, in our case, in the context of our specific socio-human realities, a “demonic model” outside the “consolidated field” of our present mode of being/feeling/knowing, as well as of the multiple discourses, their regulatory systems of meaning and interpretive “readings”, through which alone these modes of varying expressions of human “life”, including ours, can effect their respective autopeosis *as such* specific modes of being.¹⁷¹

Wynter’s argument is two-fold. First, if there is a need for a word, that word cannot simply be an alternative to words that already exist. What needs to be done, instead, is a complete shifting of the possibilities of articulation. This is the second: that our current epistemological and

¹⁷¹ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 364.

ontological milieu *cannot* conceive of this place from which to theorize the dignity of Black women. The language we have is (deliberately) impoverished as a way of keeping meaning and possibility singular. Perhaps, then, words will not do. This place and its language are “demonic”—they are other worldly and as such they are read as incoherent, and, perhaps, even dangerous to society (à la Leticia’s sense of “demonic”).

What I find generative in Wynter’s theorization is the way it presses up against the particular logics of colonialism and does not pretend to try to work within those systems but instead refuses them, even if it means appearing or being mad. Finding alternatives to Fanon’s non-being, she chooses the non-human (Chapter Four). The demonic allows—demands, even—a different theory of humanity that is illogical. The demonic avails itself to madness and mad methods. It is demonic because it is a theory of humanity that is outside the bounds of traditional logic and is a purposeful embrace of madness. *La loca* is a demonic performance. She evades the colonial logic of dialectical Africanity by manifesting as an illogical, mad personhood. She is an affirmation of the possibilities of personhood that lie beyond the reach of instrumental logic. Her Black-blackness, her drag, her mockery of labor, her mockery of the traditional festival costumes, are all physical manifestations of the demonic that are coded as incoherent and mad. There is not yet a language that can attend to the contradictions inherent in *la loca*. The post-Prospero Calibian language would only seek to cast her Africanity in terms of what Prospero has already decided counts as logical and would further contain her as it pushes to define her personhood. Instead, *la loca* evades this easy categorization. She is certainly excessive but more than this, she is the manifestation of something ineffable.

At the heart of Wynter’s reading of Caliban is the absence of “Caliban’s woman.” In *The Tempest*, Prospero is paired with his daughter, Miranda. Reading alongside theorist Luce

Irigaray, Wynter argues that Miranda represents the supposed universal condition of women: silenced.¹⁷² Note her presence, though. She is a character who has a role in the Shakespearean drama. However, in speaking to her father, she, like Caliban, has the opportunity to be represented in a meaningful way and thus can be heard only through the matrix of the subordination that Prospero has enacted on her. Second to her being imagined, she is also said to be the object of Caliban's desires. Wynter writes: "Miranda and her mode of physiognomic being, defined by the philogenically 'idealized' features of straight hair and thin lips is canonized as the 'rational' object of desire; as the potential genitrix of a superior mode of human 'life.'"¹⁷³ (Mejorar la raza, ¿no?) Caliban is said to desire after a humanity such that he is willing to desire after a silenced form of humanity. Within the dialectic, it is impossible to conceive of womanhood outside the colonial gender markers (straight hair and thin lips). Beyond Miranda, there is a noticeable "ontologically absent potential genitrix."¹⁷⁴

For Wynter, this absence is not circumstantial. Instead, the absence of origin for Caliban and of Caliban's sexual partner, here imagined as a woman, is foundational to the logics of colonialism. Colonial logic refuses both of these, Caliban and "his woman." Katherine McKittrick, in writing about Wynter's reading of absence says: "subaltern lives are not marginal/other to regulatory classificatory systems, but instead integral to them."¹⁷⁵ These are not oversights: the absence is foundational to how Caliban is imagined as monster and his partner is absent, left unimagined (or is unimaginable within the colonial, dialectical matrix).

¹⁷² Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings," 355.

¹⁷³ Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings," 360.

¹⁷⁴ Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings," 360.

¹⁷⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxv.

Wynter continues later: “the absence of Caliban’s woman, is an absence which is functional to the new secularizing schema by which peoples of Western Europe legitimated their global expansion as well as their expropriation and/their marginalization of all the other population-groups of the globe.”¹⁷⁶ Caliban’s origins and partner are purposefully obfuscated, Wynter argues, because it is impossible to imagine that subject, what they would be or could be. They lie outside of the colonial framework. Secondly, Caliban’s partner is erased because of how this benefits colonization. Recall that Caliban is said to desire after Miranda. Miranda represents the sexual and gendered way that colonization took place (read: blanquear).

This is where her use of the demonic comes into play. Personhood, what she calls “mode of being,” is based on a set of criteria which bars certain kinds of people from properly being persons. Moreover, these criteria shift over time. Initially, subjectivity is imagined as God-given. Later, subjectivity will mutate to be Natural, pre-given (Chapter Four). In either circumstance, Black women are not and cannot be imagined within the logic of those systems. Black personhood, then, is demonic in the way that it confounds logics of desire, subjectivity, and futurity.

For centuries, subjectivity was theological, Wynter argues. This phase of subjectification she calls “Man1.” In a conversation with Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick summarizes this as: the human is “tethered to the theological order of knowledge of pre-Renaissance Latin-Christian medieval Europe.”¹⁷⁷ Which is to say that the possibility of subjectivity is tied to one’s theological and religious belonging. As such, Man1 and his Others are marked by their exclusion

¹⁷⁶ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 361–2.

¹⁷⁷ Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 9–10.

to the possibility of personhood. Further, Man1 and his Others were separated out by gender. Wynter further qualified this in her analysis of *The Tempest*: theological difference was “primarily encoded in the male/female gender division.”¹⁷⁸ This difference is highlighted in the relationship between Prospero and Miranda. Man1’s Others were “heathens.”¹⁷⁹ Heathens like Moors in the south of Spain. Note: Man1 has not yet encountered heathens from the Americas. However, after “contact,” there is an epistemological, and, therefore, ontological shift. Man1 evolves into “Man2.” With Man2, the difference is no longer theological. Man2 is “secular.” Difference is not grounded in theo-gender classification but is grounded in physiological (biological) difference. Though, Man2 is birthed from Man1. Serynada argues: “The theological served as a template for the biological; Man1 provided the mold for Man2.”¹⁸⁰ “In other words,” Wynter writes, “with the shift to the secular, the primary code of difference now became between ‘men’ and ‘natives,’ with the traditional ‘male’ and ‘female’ distinctions now coming to play as secondary—if none the less powerful—reinforcing role within the system of symbolic representations.”¹⁸¹ What this means, then, is that Miranda, for example, is extended a certain kind of subjectivity, though limited and as a gift. “Man” still stands as that from which subjectivity emanates. That subjectivity, for Wynter, is always already subsumed by the one who grants subjectivity: Prospero. Moreover, the shift from Man1 to Man2 codifies this new form of subjectivity in nature as opposed to God. God is no longer the one marking out difference but the world itself reveals these differences. The native is “irrational” and “savage” by Nature, capital “n.”

¹⁷⁸ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 358.

¹⁷⁹ Serynada, “Real Human Being,” *The New Inquiry*, March 12, 2015, <https://thenewinquiry.com/real-human-being/>.

¹⁸⁰ Serynada, “Real Human Being.”

¹⁸¹ Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 358.

I argue, then, that *la loca* provides a critical intervention into the discussion of what it might mean to be a Black woman in the (post)colonial world of Puerto Rico. Instead of offering us a negative or positive view of personhood, *la loca* sidesteps those discussions. She is the unimaginable Black woman, who performs unrequested work, demands payment, and dresses inappropriately. As the extraordinary woman, she is a manifestation of the demonic. Or, she is a manifestation from “demonic grounds.” She is confusing, does not adhere to social boundaries, and is full of contradictions. She goes around causing trouble, appears for a moment or two, and then fades away. She avoids classification. She does not abide by systems that conclude their movements in absolute subjectivity. In many ways, she is not at all. And yet. *La loca* paints herself. She blackens herself. She is already Black but doubles down on blackness. Blackness in this case is not singular but multiple and ridiculous. By pointing to *la loca* as a form of life that speaks in a language foreign to colonial logic, I imagine *la loca* as possibilities and potentials of *becoming*. As a “becoming” she cannot be reduced to ontological categories. *Becoming-locas* does not yet have language (and may never). I imagine ridiculous and playful possibilities that do not offer anything other than themselves. Possibilities that seek joy and pleasure. There is no specific teleology in these potentials. Instead, they are movements and horizons. Indeed, if we were ever to arrive at the point of having a language for the “demonic” surely it would cease to be “demonic.” It would be codifiable. Instead, I argue that *la loca* and the demonic are two horizons of potentiality that continue to move and change over time. Inarticulable and ineffable horizons.

Conclusion: On the Proliferation of Africas

Anthropologist Stephan Palmié argued that “‘Africas’ have been proliferating in the New World ever since the first slaves stepped ashore on the western littoral of the Atlantic.”¹⁸² What he meant by this is that “Africa,” in the wake of the Middle Passage, is not a unity. (Perhaps it never was.) “Africa,” like gender, race, and religion, is a social construct that helps us determine and categorize certain aspects of our lives or the lives of others. As such, it is malleable and can mean many things at once. And some of those meanings might contradict and upend other meanings. Some manifestations of “Africa” might not yet even have meanings or language attached to them. And yet, the multiple meanings are entangled. Moreover, it is important to note that *creation* of “Africa” and “Africans” is not punctiliar; it is a process, one that develops over time. That is to say, “Africa” was not “African” until it was colonized. Palmié argued that so-called “Africans” in “Africa” and the Caribbean underwent their own “centuries-long process of ‘Africanization’” by “slave traders, missionaries, or colonial officials [who] told them so, and began treating them ‘as such.’”¹⁸³ Africans did not know they were “less than” (read: African and Black) until they were informed by their colonizers. There was no need for this kind of terminology until there was an “Other” present to inform them as such. This is not to read “Africa” as an Edenic point of origin but rather to read it in relation. Glissantian relation, even. Thus, the proliferation that Palmié suggests is one built on a relationship. Through this violent relationship, an unexpected proliferation occurred: new Africas, other Africas, competing

¹⁸² Stephan Palmié, “Introduction: On Predications of Africanity,” in *Africas in the Americas*, ed. Stephan Palmié (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2008), 32.

¹⁸³ Palmié, “Introduction,” 7.

Africas. This proliferation is something that continues now. “Africas” are and will continue to proliferate.

Though the Middle Passage is often thought about as a unilateral movement from Africa to the Americas, Paul Gilroy troubled this with his theorization of “the Black Atlantic.” Instead of movement (singular), Gilroy theorized the Black Atlantic as endless movements—slave ships with Africans heading “back” to Africa, for example.¹⁸⁴ In such moments, we encounter an interesting way that proliferations of Africa collide. These movements back to Africa illustrate the complicated ways that “Africa” and “Africanity” can be thought. More to the point, as both Palmié and Saidiya Hartman have shown, “return” is not so simple. Palmié showed that return is complicated by disruptions to notions of fixed origins. Likewise, Hartman as she chronicled her own journey to Ghana, hoping to find traces of herself and her family found that “return” to Africa was complicated by centuries of “Americanization.” After disembarking in Ghana, she was met with children calling her “*oburoni*,” stranger, foreigner.¹⁸⁵ Black Americans, when they travel back to Africa, are not received as “African.” Proliferations are not exact replicas. But they are not fake, either. Instead, proliferations are extensions and expansions that push boundaries.

Consentir a no ser sólo un ser, ¿no?

These movements of departure and containment illustrate the various ways that people try to make sense of modes of being in the world. Often, these modes of being contradict each other. And some modes of being do not lend themselves to articulation. This is one of the ways that “Africanity” is understood in Loíza: as negatively or positively charged. In Loíza, Africa is religious-racial, an interconnected way of saying the same without saying the same. What is

¹⁸⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 17.

¹⁸⁵ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 19.

considered African is considered “backwards,” “foreign,” or “superstitious.” In some cases, it is “demonic,” even. At the same time, Loiceños use Africa as a method of connecting themselves to a historical past in the present. They use “Africa” as a way of narrating themselves as important historical and contemporary actors. These Africas are multiple. At times, they are also not yet defined. And as such, they do not need to be settled. Different groups, with different political commitments and historical leanings will find and fill the word with different meanings. In *la loca*, we see another form of Africanity that avoids the movement between these two poles of negatively and positively charged forms of Africanity. *La loca* is a mode of being in the world that is demonic: full of potential. The demonic is also that which we do not have language for and in that sense, it is ineffable. Avoiding the dialectic, though, is not without its price. The demonic is nonsense and illogical. It is mad.

CHAPTER 3: LA LOCA: PLAY AND POLITICS

La loca es maestra de la vida y por eso, la loca educa, ay, cómo educa, enseña y enseña y habla y habla a más no poder, limpia y pula y da resplandor, empuja y suplica y llora
—Larry La Fountain-Stokes¹⁸⁶

(La loca is life's teacher and for that reason, la loca teaches oh, how she teaches, instructs and instructs and speaks and speaks until she cannot, how she cleans, polishes, and makes things radiant, strives, demands, and cries.)

Verano 2019

Spiderman hung off the side of a lamppost. He gripped it and spun around it like a stripper. He looked over his shoulder as he slid down the pole, enticing the crowd around him, who whooped and hollered with glee. Over his shoulders, like a cape, he wore the Puerto Rican flag. *Miles Morales finally found his way to Puerto Rico*, I thought to myself.¹⁸⁷ With the music, he thrust his hips toward the lamppost. The hit summer song, “Perreo Intenso,” played loudly in the background. “Que to'a las diabla' pongan la' mano' en la pared/Que se doblen y me perreen a to' lo' títere',” rapped Farruko and KEVVO.¹⁸⁸ “Bad girls, put your hands on the wall/All the puppets bend over and perreo on me,” they rap. Notice the slip between “diabla” (devilish women) and the intended “bad girls,” confident women who do not conform to societal norms, who flirt not only with strangers on the dancefloor but with the demonic itself, like la loca. The stereotypical dembow beats of Puerto Rican reggaetón dictated Spiderman's thrusts. He lifted

¹⁸⁶ Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, “¡Maricones de Río Piedras, Uníos!” in *Escencas transcaribeñas: Ensayos sobre teatro, performance y cultura* (San Juan: Isla Negra Editores, 2018), 26.

¹⁸⁷ Miles Morales is an Afro-Puerto Rico Brooklynite from the comic book series *Spiderman*. In the series, after the death of Peter Parker, Morales takes over the titular role.

¹⁸⁸ Puerto Ricans tend to drop consonants. “Que to'a las diabla' pongan la' mano'” might otherwise be written as “Que todas las diabras pongan las manos.”

one leg off the post, held it aloft by the knee, and gyrated. On the lamppost, all by himself, he was *perreando*. Perreo is a dance similar to twerking. Elizabeth Pérez neatly describes it as “a dense composite of various dance moves that include hip rolling and the clapping together, pumping, twitching, compression, and release of the buttocks.”¹⁸⁹ On the ground, others twerked with him. In groups, pairs, or by themselves, the people gathered had all become diabras through their dance moves. Diabras, as Ortiz theorized, like Santiago’s counterparts during la fiesta. Lawless and pleasure-seeking little devils.



Figure 4.1 Street sign renamed to read “Calle de la Resistencia.” Photo by author.

I saw Spiderman on the evening of July 24, 2019. A week earlier, nearly a million people gathered in Viejo San Juan for the first island-wide protest Puerto Rico had seen in years. If residents could not make it to San Juan, they protested where they could: outside the mayor’s office in their city, on the sides of major streets, or online. The 24th is the day before the feast day of Santiago. Earlier that morning, a herald had run through the streets of Loíza announcing the opening of la fiesta. In Viejo San Juan, a woman with a large metal spoon and pot announced that enough was enough. My aunt, Mónica, texted and asked if I wanted to go to the protests happening in Viejo San Juan in response to failures of then-governor Ricardo “Ricky” Rosselló’s

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Pérez, “The Ontology of Twerk: From ‘Sexy’ Black Movement Style to Afro-Diasporic Sacred Dance,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9, no. 1 (2015): 18.

administration. Viejo San Juan is where the governor's mansion, called La Fortaleza, is located. For weeks, protestors gathered at La Fortaleza to demand that the governor step down from office after it was revealed that he and others from his cabinet were participating in a racist, homophobic, and misogynistic group chat, locally known as called "Telegramgate" or "RickyLeaks." To add insult to injury, the governor's group chat also ridiculed survivors of Hurricane María, calling them whiny victims who are looking for handouts. Even in July 2019, Puerto Rico was still reeling from María, nearly 24 months after the hurricane made landfall: people without roofs, without electricity, and without steady meals. When the chat log was released to the public, the people went to the streets. Protests centralized around La Fortaleza lasted for over a month. Street signs that once read "Calle de La Fortaleza" were renamed "Calle de La Resistencia." This was no longer the street to the governor's mansion; this was the people's street. This was no longer a place of governance but a place of ungovernability.

Previously, I had not been able to get out of Loíza because I did not have a car—and because of my limited time, I wanted to dedicate as much time as possible to being in Loíza. However, I welcomed the opportunity to go to the protests. Various aspects of la fiesta had already begun: they had blessed the images of Santiago and processed them from árbol de corcho to La Parroquia Santiago, and novenas had already begun and were had just finished the previous evening. All that remained to be done is the reenactment of Santiago's miraculous movements through the procession of his images from church to church along calle 187. As I prepared myself to join the procession down calle 187, to dance in the streets with locas, vejigantes, and caballeros, a different procession and fiesta were taking place in Viejo San Juan. Instead of processing sacred images of Santiago down calle 187, members of the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción processed a guillotine down Calle de La Resistencia. The guillotine's blade was the

triangular portion of the Puerto Rican flag. These guillotines were ubiquitous during the protests. Those gathered had come to Viejo San Juan to participate in a *cacerolazo*, a form of political protest popular in Latin America where protestors use pots and pans to make cacophonous noise. The noise demands attention when voices or voting will not do. The guillotines were an unexpected addition but one that was met with cheers from the crowds. This protest was serious and the protestors demanded to be taken seriously.

Like the procession along 187, the protestors in Viejo San Juan were a nameless and masked crowd of people. Some protestors had been there for days. Others, like myself and Mónica, came for the night. It was expected that Ricardo Rosselló would announce his resignation that night. The huge metal Versailles-like gate kept the protestors well clear of La Fortaleza. However, given his anticipated announcement, a line of police and barricades kept the protestors farther away from the governor's residence. This meant that the protest that was centralized in front of the governor's mansion had spilled over into other streets. Calle de La Resistencia was no longer one street but many. Just down the street, in front of La Catedral San Juan Bautista, a young woman in a Puerto Rican flag bikini bent over, and like Spiderman, and perreod alone.¹⁹⁰ She danced in front of a transgender pride flag, which was flanked by black and white Puerto Rican flag and the gay pride flag. With reggaetón blasting over the speakers, a protest transformed into a party. Or, rather, that along with protest, a party was taking place. Even though Rosselló had not actually stepped down yet, the people celebrated. A porous line existed between protest and play. The protestors demonstrated that to play does not mean that

¹⁹⁰ In February 2020, the trap artist Bad Bunny's song "Yo Perreo Sola" ("I perreo alone") captured this sentiment: desiring to dance alone. The song subsequently became a feminist anthem. The song's lyrics speak to women's right and desire to dance twerk on their own, without being harassed or violated by men. *Perrear*, traditionally, understood as a couple's dance with the male dance partner being the recipient of the twerk. However, women increasingly wanted to perrear with other women or without a partner. Bad Bunny's song codified this desire to dance alone and to not need a partner. Later, in October 2020, the song was covered by female reggaetón pioneer Ivy Queen, adding leverage to the song's feminist tendencies.

one is not being serious. And likewise, protest is not only found in chants and banners but can also be found in joy and pleasure.

The next day, as Mónica and I discussed the night's events over coffee in her home, she critiqued the woman wearing a bikini and the *perreo* in front of La Catedral: "What does this accomplish?" she asked. "And in front of the church? Dancing like *locas*? *¡Eso no se hace!*" Her tone was stern, as if the dancers were there and she were speaking directly to them. Mónica disapproved of the protest becoming *fiesta*. "*¿Bailando como locas?*" "Dancing like madwomen?" she asked rhetorically. Her disapproval indicating that these *locas* were tarnishing the serious work of the protestors in front of La Fortaleza. In this instance, "loca" is inflected with inappropriate transgression. For her, the protest held the moral high ground. It was about holding corrupt politicians accountable, calling for a change in systems of governance, and demanding respect for the dead and the survivors of Hurricane María. *Perreando*, though, was none of those things. Her comment, "What does this accomplish?" undermined the place of dancing and pleasure in protest. Further, her comment, "Dancing like *locas*? You don't do that!" draws into question the morality of pleasure. Indeed, it questions *how* one *should* protest. Ostensibly, Mónica was saying that dances like that belong in the club, not in front of a church. The space demanded comportment. The building itself demanded respect and the *locas* in front of La Catedral were not giving the appropriate amount of respect to the building.

Mónica's critique prompted an important question: how do joy and pleasure fit into political protest? Another question could be asked here: how does *la loca* fit into *la fiesta*? Those who danced in front of La Catedral were protesting, surely. Likewise, *la loca* is processing and celebrating Santiago just like everyone else. However, *las locas* in front of La Catedral were protesting in ways that Mónica did not appreciate. Protests have demands, acceptable goals,

measurable outcomes. However, las locas de Viejo San Juan had none of those things. They sought sensuous pleasure in a front of a place of solemn indifference. Important to keep in mind here, though, is that they sought pleasure in the midst of a protest. That is to say, their protest was about reclaiming joy in a time of turmoil. Almost two years to the date after Hurricane María, the wounds had barely begun to heal and Rosselló had opened up a wound that could not be shut. To help heal, people needed to find spaces and forms of joy. *El perreo combativo*, as this form of protest-play came to be called, was not a traditional form of political protest that sought to change anything except the moment. However, it was a form of protest all the same.

“Combativo” signifying that this *was* political. “Combativo” because this was a tactic of direct action—just like the cacerolazo. It is living and acting as if one is already free.¹⁹¹ Its goal was not social change, per se. Instead, perreo combativo was about reclaiming joy in the midst of incredible sadness; it is about creating “a sensuous and liberated communal space.”¹⁹²

This chapter takes seriously the role of joy and pleasure in and around la fiesta. I theorize la loca’s pleasure-seeking as without reference to ultimate purpose. Pleasure is its own goal. And pleasure is the method by which that goal will be achieved. To theorize the protest-play of las locas, inside and outside of la fiesta, I position la loca’s locura as a form of antiauthoritarianism. Specifically, I develop “locura” as a theorization of “anarchy,” as anti-civility, and as against the social grain. Tying together the work of Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong’o and Saidiya Hartman, the protest-play of la loca is a form of seeking “otherwise.” This otherwise, though, is often destination-less. Those who protest do not always know what they want or, even if they do,

¹⁹¹ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 203.

¹⁹² Verónica Dávila and Marisol LeBrón, “How Music Took Down Puerto Rico’s Governor,” *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/how-music-took-down-puerto-ricos-governor/>.

much less know all the mechanisms required to get there. They know, however, that the present state of things is insufficient. In order to further think about this form of protest-play as non-teleological, I look to the 1998 statehood protest that took place in Puerto Rico. When the question of statehood again returned, the island famously voted for “none of the above,” an option criticized by politicians as insanity (*locura*). The public did not want to be the fifty-first state in the United States nor did they want independence. None of the options available to the Puerto Rican people inspired much hope. “None of the above,” then, is a way of thinking about the antiauthoritarianism of *locas* without thinking of them as having endgame. Their endgame is protest-play. They do not seek office nor do they seek official recognition. From there, I move to think about who gets to protest-play through the Spanish word “*joder*.” Comparing and contrasting experiences of men and women during *la fiesta*, protest-play is gendered. Women are scrutinized for their protest-play. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to be transgressing—or, at least, allowed to.

I end this chapter with a reflection on *locas* and *locura* as teachers. Reflecting on what they do, that is, their disruptiveness, what can one learn from *locas*? Rather than dismiss *la loca*, we would do well to think with her, about how we might join in her madness and seek otherwise. *Locas* avoid questions of what joy accomplishes and instead are singularly focused on the affective effects of pleasure.

Locura: A Theory of Anarchy

Those mad women, dancing, half-naked in front of La Catedral were for all intents and purposes the foil of civilized behavior, at least according to Mónica. In this scene during the protests of summer 2019, “*loca*” takes on additional meaning. So far, I have been tracking *locura*

as multiplicity (Chapter One) and unimaginable possibility (Chapter Two). To these I add madness as the opposite of civility. Or the supposed opposite. Mónica's comment about las locas de Viejo San Juan was a way of describing acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior. To be "loca" in this case is to lie outside acceptable forms of public appearing. In this sense, then, loca is contrasted with civility. (Recall the irony, though: las locas de Viejo San Juan were there as a part of a protest, something which could also ostensibly be called "uncivil.")

Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o's theory of "wildness" is a productive way for thinking about locas. Halberstam and Nyong'o write: "Wildness has functioned as foil to civilization, as the dumping ground for all that white settler colonialism has wanted to declare expired, unmanageable, undomesticated, and politically unruly."¹⁹³ Indeed, Puerto Rico, in general, and las locas, in particular, have served as the dumping ground for white settler colonialism and effort to contain both the Taínos and the enslaved African populations. Here again we encounter this effort to contain and control. To think about la loca as uncivilized, I argue, is to think about her as anarchistic. Calling the women in front of La Catedral "locas" was a way of marking them as unruly and undomesticated. This is not the first time that Black women have been the dumping ground for such categorization in Puerto Rico.¹⁹⁴ "Loca," in this instance, points to a racialized history of what is deemed proper behavior.

Halberstam and Nyong'o continue: "Wildness is loud and disruptive; it interrupts the neat narratives of freedom and escape, and it lurks within an anarchistic longing."¹⁹⁵ To be "wild" is to refuse the quick and dry distinction between sovereignty and captivity, between freedom and

¹⁹³ Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o, "Introduction: Theory in the Wild," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2018): 453.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹⁹⁵ Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Introduction," 455.

unfreedom, between statehood and independence. Wildness is indifferent, and therefore demonic. It avoids the dialectic. Instead, wild ones seek the momentary flashes wherein they can express themselves *in spite of*. To be wild is to perreo sola in front of La Catedral. To perreo, to be wild, in the “oldest colony in the world” is madness.¹⁹⁶ What does this flash of wildness even mean? What could it mean? Recall the situation in Viejo San Juan: Rosselló had not even stepped down and yet the people celebrated. To be wild, then, is to celebrate before there is anything to celebrate. Wildness is not an overarching system of liberation; it is not a revolutionary plan with list of demands and policies. Locas just want to perreo sola—it does not require more than oneself. Wildness is madness.

I find this use of wildness to be productive for thinking about how unruly politics manifest in Puerto Rico. “Ruly” politics is a form of political belonging and participation that works within systems of recognition and accountability, even if those systems are of civil disobedience (like protests). “Unruly politics,” however, has no time for subjectivity. The same is true for la loca: no one goes around la fiesta to make sure she is present. She just shows up at your doorstep—sometimes unwanted. There is no casting the role of la loca. She has no accountability. Moreover, after la fiesta, no one makes sure la loca gets home safely. She does not turn in her costume to anyone. Anyone can be la loca. She is everywhere and nowhere. She does not clock in and does not clock out. She is ungoverned. The locas dancing in front of La Catedral were not respecting the space where they danced. (And presumably did not care about being respected in return.) The wildness of the locas means that their politics, their lives, and their actions will always be allocated to places of institutional erasure, or, the “dumping ground,” as Halberstam and Nyong’o call it. Institutional here is not only formal authority figures, like

¹⁹⁶ José Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico: Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Rosselló, but also those who reify that authority in their dismissal of la loca and her indifference to political ambitions, like Mónica and others who would seek to discipline la loca.

La loca's unruliness goes further. Not only does she eschew ruly politics. She refuses "politics" itself. In that sense, la loca leans towards what Saidiya Hartman calls "anarchy." Hartman writes: "To wander through the streets of Harlem, to want better than what she had, to be propelled by her whims and desires was to be ungovernable. Her way of living was nothing short of anarchy."¹⁹⁷ "Anarchy," then, is not just the political ideologies of Peter Kropotkin or Mikhail Bakunin. Along with mutual aid or collectivism, anarchy is also the strategy by which wild people imagine life otherwise, take their life into their own hands, and wander the streets seeking to be themselves. Imagining otherwise, though, is not specific. It is daydreaming. It is having fun. It is not policy or political party. These wild women, on the streets of Harlem, Viejo San Juan, or Loíza, personify a variety of lifegiving actions that are grounded in finding and experiencing what they can of happiness and joy. For the women in Hartman's article, they sought after that which would bring about the greatest fulfillment for them and for their lives in the moment. Regarding one loca, Esther Brown, Hartman continues: "She longed for another way of living in the world. She was hungry for enough, for otherwise, for better. She was hungry for beauty."¹⁹⁸ Brown recognized her current situation was not adequate. She wanted different and better. However, her plan for different and better, was not policy. Hartman continues: "she did not try to create a poem or song or painting. What she created was Esther Brown."¹⁹⁹ Esther Brown did not seek to transform society but sought to transform herself that day, in that moment.

¹⁹⁷ Saidiya Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner," *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2018): 466.

¹⁹⁸ Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 469.

¹⁹⁹ Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 469.

Locura, as a theory of wildness and antiauthoritarian anarchism is about creating and re-creating oneself.

Self-creation, then, becomes a form of movement that is not oriented toward further political action. What matters is the (bodily) pleasure in self-possession. Instead of thinking about politics as futurity, locura is a form of engagement that is focused on the here and now. As such, it is a comment, like Esther Brown, on history up to this moment. Locura is a manifestation, an expression, a happening. It does not have much to offer other than the expression itself. It does not offer a way forward. Instead, it lives into whatever opportunities for expression it has. For Esther Brown, she offered herself to herself. For las locas in front of La Catedral, they offered music and dance, highlighting beauty, play, pleasure, and happiness. As an anarchistic aesthetic, locura is not so much concerned with participatory politics or representational politics. Locura, instead, is a way of being in the world that is vehemently anti-loca. It finds and seizes the gaps to make space for itself.

“Ninguna de Las Anteriores”: Politics of None of the Above

Puerto Ricans are no stranger to la loca’s locura and her “outcomeless” political protest. “Outcomeless” because the protest is not concerned with what happens next. Instead, the higher concern is the action itself. Locura does not seek to upend political regimes; no, locura is the purposeful choosing of “absurdity” in the face of the absurdity of life or politics as usual. From Lolita Lebrón’s 1954 purposefully shooting the ceiling in the US House of Representatives or the 1977 Puerto Rican nationalist’s occupation of the Statue of Liberty, they knew their actions would not change the colonial status of their home. And yet. And yet they persisted in drawing attention to the scandalous treatment of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. Locura is about drawing

attention to absurdity—not trying to resolve it. Like *la loca* who paints her Black face black, *locura* points out the obvious through parody, irony, and redundancy.

In 1998, a perennial question was put to the residents of Puerto Rico: what did they want their future to be?²⁰⁰ Would they continue attempting (and failing to achieve) statehood? Or, did they want to continue to be a free associated state, commonly known as the “commonwealth option”? Or did they favor political independence? Or did they favor a combination of commonwealth and independence? Or *ninguna de las anteriores* (“none of the above”)? All of this, of course, must be taken with a grain of salt. As a colony of the United States, this question is not so different than an opinion poll run by a student newspaper. Plebiscites reflect the climate of the selected environment but do not have the power to bring about any of the options listed. Thus, the 1998 poll could not do anything meaningful. It was pure theater. A façade. *¡Qué papelón!*

Ultimately, “ninguna de las anteriores” won. No political destiny seemed to inspire hope. Puerto Rican voters refused to tie themselves to any political destiny. Moreover, all pretenses of “democracy” were revealed when then-governor Pedro Rosselló, Ricardo’s father, declared to US congressman Don Young that the statehood option had actually won. Young demanded an answer for the fact that “none of the above” won the popular vote. Rosselló’s declaration was an attempt to cover himself. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner puts it: “the outcome implied that the electorate had gone legally *insane*. The impression that Puerto Rican voters had *lost their minds* was probably not lost on Rosselló himself.”²⁰¹ In choosing *ninguna de las anteriores*, Puerto

²⁰⁰ Notice the wording here: the question was put to the people—not the other way around. Then-governor Pedro Rosselló (father of Ricardo) pushed for another last-minute vote on statehood before the end of his second term in an attempt to solidify his party’s future and the island’s relationship with the United States. See Frances Negrón-Muntaner, “Introduction,” in *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, ed. by Frances Negrón-Muntaner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–2.

²⁰¹ Negrón-Muntaner, “Introduction,” 3; emphasis mine.

Ricans revealed themselves to be mad, to be locas. Wanting to save face, Rosselló decided against the insanity plea and instead told Young that the outcome was a protest against him for selling the state-run telecommunications to the private, US-based company GTE, now Verizon Communications.²⁰² Thus, in the face of insanity, with only 46.6 percent of the votes, Rosselló declared himself and his party the victors. In reality, though, the majority, 50.5 percent, had lost their minds.

If “none of the above” is madness, what do such options even mean? Plebiscites such as the one given in 1998 have no real political outcome; nothing would have changed even if the majority of voters had supported statehood. Conversely, if they voted for “Independence” the island would have remained a colony of the United States.²⁰³ Instead, Puerto Ricans chose indifference. To willingly choose non-futurity is locura: it is leaning into absurdity to point out absurdity. Locura, though, does not feign belief that madness is a method for political change. Instead, “none of the above” points to the absurdity of the question. Indeed, what does it mean to ask the unfree if they would rather their freedom? Negrón-Munater takes ninguna de las anteriores as an example of political performance and calls it “*puro teatro*,” pure theater.²⁰⁴ Importantly, “none of the above” puro teatro does not offer alternatives. It is dissatisfaction with *all* the possibilities. Dissatisfaction with the question itself, even. One can only imagine the cognitive dissonance of asking a colonial subject what they want their future to look like—in a non-binding plebiscite, no less. While some argued that this action would inevitably lead to more

²⁰² Negrón-Muntaner, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁰³ Imagine for a moment the absurdity here of putting the question of “freedom” to unfree people. What does that question even mean? On the one hand, is the question even genuine? If one votes for freedom, would freedom even be granted? On the other hand, how do the unfree understand the question? Do they themselves think that freedom could come through the ballot box?

²⁰⁴ Negrón-Muntaner, “Introduction,” 4.

of the same,²⁰⁵ the very nature of the coloniality already guaranteed that. That is to say, no matter what the decision is, Puerto Rico, a colony with no congressional voting rights or representation, has no representation in the systems of “civil government” that control it.²⁰⁶ The island is stuck.

In the face of this stuckness, one finds agency and possibility in the smallest of places. As a political strategy it is not unlike those locas in front of La Catedral who just wanted to shake their asses and have a good time. Locura, then, is a way of expressing oneself. Madness is not a way out; it is a cry from within. As puro teatro, locas are performing their madness in the face of those who would rather erase them. In the case of 1998 plebiscite, they are expressing their locura through their performative voting. They were playing with limits, with what is acceptable, and playing with the logics of coloniality. Las locas in front of La Catedral were playing music, playing with limits of gender expression, and they are playing on constructed notions of decency. It should not be lost on us that las locas in front of La Catedral twerked with trans pride flags and gay pride flags. Play is not about use-value, it does not consider expense, and it is not concerned with tactics. It only means that it is differently oriented to how we think of being and becomings. This is not to say it is passive, though. Quite the opposite. Play takes into consideration the past and present and says that enough is enough. It is “serious play.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ For example, see Christina Duffy Burnett, “‘None of the Above’ Means More of the Same: Why Solving Puerto Rico’s Status Problem Matters,” in *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era*, ed. Frances Negrón-Muntaner, 73–83 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁰⁶ This does not stop politicians on the island from campaigning with statehood as their primary goal. Pedro Pierluisi, the newly elected governor of Puerto Rico, in his inaugural speech as governor, promised that Puerto Rico would become a state under his leadership. This will be the statehood party’s (PNP or Partido Nuevo Progresista) sixth attempt to achieve statehood since the island has been allowed to elect its own governors. See Associated Press, “New Governor Sworn in as a Wary Puerto Rico Demands Changes,” *Independent*, January 2, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/new-governor-sworn-in-as-a-wary-puerto-rico-demands-changes-puerto-rico-governor-democrat-wanda-vazquez-governor-b1781578.html>.

²⁰⁷ Melissa Wilcox, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

Joder: Playfulness, Fun, and Non-compliance

Willian and I were sat under a flamboyán tree. The flamboyán trees in Puerto Rico stood out for their reds, oranges, and purples. If you were coming down from the mountainous El Yunque, the rainforest region to the southwest of Loíza, you could easily spot them. Their colors contrasted brightly with the lush green of the mountains. In Loíza, they are sprinkled throughout the city. They are like arboreal accent marks. Little flashes here and there. As spring turns into summer and into fall, their leaves coat and paint the ground underneath them. The tree we sat under was not as dense as others and so it provided little shade. Some of its flowers had fallen and as cars drove past, grinding the delicate flowers into the ground, giving it a red hue. In the buttoned-up procession of images of Santiago, la loca comes on the scene like these brilliant trees. She is a flash of brightness. Her indecent acts and energy constantly flaring up and contrasting with the setting around her.

Willian is a loca. For a few years now, he told me, he has performed la loca during la fiesta. We were waiting on our ride to a bomba workshop in Piñones, a community in western Loíza. Willian takes classes at COPI, Corporación Piñones Se Integra, a small community-run organization that seeks to preserve built and natural environments in the area. Beyond the bomba classes and workshops offered, they also offered canoe and kayak rentals to explore Piñones. “¿A mi? ¡Me gusta joder!” he casually said aloud, to no one in particular. He fiddled with a flower from the tree that he picked up from the ground.

He let out deep chuckle. “Heh!” he said, almost dismissing himself and what he just said. “Me? I like to joke around!” he said. “Joder” has a range of meanings. It can mean something like “mischievous play,” which is how Willian meant it. But when used by an authority figure to a subordinate, it can mean something much more aggressive, like “fucking around” in the sense

of messing up, failing to meet standards. But also “fucking around” in a more aggressive “mischievous play” sense. It, like many words, have flexible meanings and uses. And people take advantage of these slippages. “Joder” is something I would hear parents say to their children when they would not sit still or as their children ran off to play with other children, for example. Depending on the context, the inflection, the person, it can mean all of these things at once. La loca, like Willian, likes to joder. She goes around la fiesta being a joke *and* joking around—fucking around, even.

In a hypermasculine country like Puerto Rico, even jokingly flirting with men can be dangerous. Women and transgender people have been increasingly on the other end of verbal and physical abuse—and increasing violence and death. Organizations like Colectiva Feminista en Construcción have long petitioned the government to declare a state of emergency given the exponential increase in violence against women.²⁰⁸ “¡No me jodas más!” is not an uncommon hypermasculinist refrain. “Stop fucking with me!” is something I would hear fathers tell their children, as they would with their parent to be allowed to go to the beach with friends. La loca no stranger to hearing “¡No me jodas más!” As she flirts with men along calle 187, she transgresses societal boundaries of proper gender and sexuality. As the extra-ordinary woman, la loca’s gender bending performance further complicate her flirtation. As Zaragoza says, la loca “is distasteful to Puerto Rican society because, like Eve, she flaunts herself rather than maintaining the more customary modesty befitting women.”²⁰⁹ La loca’s femininity, read through “Christian coloniality,” is perceived as immodest. “Christian coloniality” being the

²⁰⁸ See Aurora Santiago Ortiz, “La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción are Leading the Puerto Rican Resistance,” *Open Democracy*, January 14, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/la-colectiva-feminista-en-construccion-are-leading-the-puerto-rican-resistance/>.

²⁰⁹ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 112; italics in original.

mutually influencing nodes of heteronormativity and Christian theology, which manages “public spaces and production of specific kinds of human citizen subjects.”²¹⁰ La loca does not behave. Beyond “flaunting” her gender, la loca flaunts rules of sexuality. It is one thing to jokingly flirt as an obviously heterosexual man with another man. It is something completely different to do so in the guise of an extra-ordinary woman. La loca’s plays too much with the grey areas of appropriate gender performance, which are governed by theological-colonial standards of modesty and decency.²¹¹

“¡No me jodas más!” walks a fine line. It is also a common refrain among friends when one gets too familiar. “Stop fucking with me!” is something that might be shouted at la loca as she blows kisses to a spectator during the procession of Santiago’s images. Usually with her girlfriends (fellow locas), la loca is known to flirtatiously engage the crowd. Zaragoza argued that: “The *loca* is a flirt. She parades down the route of the religious processions more like a prostitute, soliciting attentions [sic].”²¹² During la fiesta, I saw la loca, usually with her girlfriends huddled together, mimicking the of sharing gossip: hand coyly over their mouths as they blow kisses and wink to other attendees. Here, “¡No me jodas!” is more like “Stop bothering me!” La loca’s flirtation walks the line of bothersome and dangerous upending of gender and sexual mores.

I asked Willian why he liked to mess around. He looked at me confused. “I just like to have fun,” he said. The shrug of his shoulders and the puzzled look on his face suggested he has never been asked this question before. *Is he asking me why I like to have fun?* he must have

²¹⁰ Ana-Maurine Lara, *Streetwalking: LGBTQ Lives and Protest in the Dominican Republic* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 44.

²¹¹ See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²¹² Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 112; italics in original.

thought to himself. “Ever since I was a kid, I liked to have fun. In school, the teacher used to tell my parents that I couldn’t sit still. I was always getting into trouble doing little things, getting in trouble at school,” he continues. “I guess I am just like *poca vergüenza*,” he said, prodding me with his elbow and visibly biting his tongue. Like *joder*, “*poca vergüenza*” is a flexible term that can range in meaning from playful behavior to outright “inappropriate” behavior. It translates to something like “shameless.” *La loca* and Willian both play with meaning and appropriate behavior. As *la loca*, he finds the space where it is acceptable to transgress. In school, for example, he was not supposed to *joder*. However, *locura* allows him to *joder* and to relish *poca vergüenza*.

Willian is the only *loca* that I was able to have substantial conversations with during my fieldwork. He was exceedingly generous with his time and home, where I met with him on one occasion as he prepared himself to take on *la loca*. He was a man of modest means. He inherited his home from his father after he died in 2008. Since then, he’s made little effort to change anything about his childhood home. On the ground floor, for instance, a huge CRT television sat underneath the stairs. The tiny screen was encased by a larger wooden frame. The channel selection knobs and antenna were caked with dust and cobwebs. On top, Willian placed a newer flat-screen TV. “It doesn’t work,” he told me, pointing with pursed lips to the bottom TV. “But I also don’t want to get rid of it. It’s a piece of history.” His sofa was covered in yellowed plastic wrap meant to preserve the fabric underneath. Magazines from the early 2000s were stacked next to the sofa on a side table.

Willian said to likes to play *la loca* and does so often, even playing her in other patron festivals, such as during *las fiestas en honor a San Sebastian* in Viejo San Juan. It is a time when he can be carefree like when he was younger. “I guess it is a way to have fun?” his intonation

indicating a statement said as a question. He was not sure himself. “My dad was strict. One time, during summer, I was playing with my friends outside. When I came home, my dad said, ‘why aren’t you studying?’ ‘Dad, it’s summer!’ I said. ‘*¡Eso no me importa!*’” “That does not matter to me!” his dad told him. “Maybe I get to be a kid finally,” he said with another dismissive “Heh!” As *la loca*, he can freely play, costume, and make believe without consequence. Today, as an adult with two jobs, taxes to pay, he is constrained, he says. *Joder*, then, is a way of thinking about failure to comply and playfulness, and their intersections.

Willian was not a small man. Over six feet tall with a large stomach, it is difficult to imagine that he could ever be lost in a crowd, which is to say nothing of his immense presence when he becomes *la loca*. When he played her, he liked to dress in wild animal prints, zebra and leopard were some of his go-to *bata* patterns. The scarves he wore around his head were similarly bright but solid colors—bright white or red. Dressed in women’s clothing, he was not attempting to “pass.” That is, he was not attempting to be regarded as a woman but rather as spectacle. For many, when they hear the word “drag,” the word conjures images of gender-bending performances like those seen on *RuPaul’s Drag Show*, the US television show about drag queens where the goal is “fierceness” or “fabulousness.” On the show, performers are given categories in which they participate and compete with one another. For the most part, “drag,” the gender-bending performance of a gender other than one’s own through clothing, gesture, and makeup, is about displaying one’s prowess.²¹³ Queens strut across the stage with confidence as they showcase their talents. However, for *la loca*, drag is less about fabulousness than it is about ridiculousness. *La loca* does not seek to succeed in any kind of reasonable sense. She attempts to succeed by failing, failing to comply, even to the standards of drag, and to succeed by having

²¹³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 88.

fun. Her logic is not the logic of late modernity, whether it be passing or fierceness, but rather a logic of *joder*, failure, fucking around, and disinhibition.

What Willian was attempting to produce in his performance as *la loca* was pleasure and enjoyment. I propose, then, a different way of understanding play. Play is not something that tries to produce something. Instead, play is about the punctiliar moment in which one finds themselves, like Hartman's anarchists in Harlem. As such, play is not future orientated. Play is *ninguna de las anteriores*. Play, in this sense, is purely interested in this moment. Play has no plan. Like French philosopher Georges Bataille's theory of the "sacred": there is no mediation, no contemplation of next steps, there is only the search for immanence.²¹⁴ For Bataille, the sacred is a way of talking about a non-hierarchical relationship between becomings, like the wasp and the orchid. Traditionally, there is a subject-object orientation between means and ends such that externalities are made into tools that the subject can wield for their own intentions. Bataille writes: "The tool has no value itself—like the subject, or the world, or the elements that are of the same nature as the subject or the world—but only in relation to an anticipated result."²¹⁵ Instead, Bataille describes sacred relationships as "water in water."²¹⁶ Like drops of water in the ocean with no differentiation—only one drop becoming like the next. *La loca* is like the "none of the above" attitude. There is no utilitarian thought about outcomes. *You want me to vote in a survey that cannot change my destiny? I would rather choose insanity*, she might say. She is there for pleasure and play. Asking what she hopes to achieve is met with confusion. *What do I want? To have fun! What is it about fun that needs purpose?*

²¹⁴ Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 29.

²¹⁵ Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 28.

²¹⁶ Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 18.

Who Gets to Play: Gender and Pleasure

My conversations with Willian sat with me. He was such a big personality. In some ways, I think he wanted it that way. His laugh, the way he playfully (flirtatiously) engaged with me, and his performance as *la loca* were all methods by which he lived on after our meetings. What became increasingly clear as time went on was *who* got to be transgressive. Indeed, what I found was that one's ability to transgress was based upon already existing preconditions of appropriate behavior, all governed by theo-gender. This was made clear to me in my futile attempts to work with community members in some "behind-the-scenes" capacities. Willian nurtured moments of relief and relaxation in *la loca*. Others, however, would work just as hard but would not earn transgression.

María stood off to the side during my conversation with Padre Orlando Bonilla outside the manse attached to La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol. She came over midway through our chat, presumably to talk with Bonilla. She stood with her hands neatly folded at her waist, politely smiling and looking interested in what must have been a boring conversation for her: me introducing myself. The way she stood felt like she was waiting for an opportunity to jump into the conversation. But she waited patiently for her opportunity. Even as I looked to her, trying in vain to invite her into the conversation, she remained silent. In those moments, she would smile and look eagerly to Bonilla, awaiting his reply. In her left hand, she held a massive Styrofoam tray, the kind that comes with pre-packaged meat from grocery stores. She kept her right hand firmly closed so as not to let anything out—or anything in. Her right hand was orange-yellow with *adobo* and *sazón*, key spice mixtures for making *comida criolla*.

This was the first time I met Padre Bonilla. This conversation was just to introduce myself, let him know I would be attending Mass, and be around La Parroquia Santiago in general. He simply nodded along, seemingly confused about why I was explaining all of this to him. By now he must be used to tourists and academics of all kinds coming by the parish, asking questions about Santiago, cameras around their necks, Panama-style hats, and sunscreen caked onto their noses. Even still, he entertained me. He took his time when responding to questions. He was never in a rush. Soft spoken, I would often have to lean in or ask him to repeat something in order to understand him. His Colombian Spanish accenting things differently than his Loiceño parishioners might.

It was meant to be a short conversation but it snowballed, as conversations tend to. We eventually came to the topic of religious services that would be held during la fiesta and I asked him if there was anything going on at the church the next day. He paused, he looked up, flipping through the card catalogue of his mind. María found her opportunity to join in: “Come by tomorrow. We are going to be cooking all day and raising money for the church,” she said. At the time, it was not clear who the “we” was. I asked what time they would start cooking and offered my, albeit limited, help. She smiled at the offer and told me just to come by and “enjoy.” “*No se preocupe,*” she said. “Don’t worry,” she said, addressing me formally.

When I arrived Saturday afternoon like María had invited me to, I found the church’s parking lot abuzz with music playing over speakers, people standing and chatting, and the smell of fried food in the air. I approached the kiosko where María and a few other women were gathered cooking Loiceño delicacies, like bacalaíto, alcapurria, and *arroz con gandules*, in massive pots. It was already hot enough outside but that heat was intensified in the barely ventilated cinderblock stall. Again, I offered to help. Having never before cooked alcapurria or

bacalaíto, I told María: “Just tell me what to do and I will do it.” I meant it: I wanted to make myself useful. But also, following Elizabeth Pérez, I understood the kitchen to be a place of teaching and learning by doing, and the impartation of (sacred) knowledge through the butchering, seasoning, and cooking of animals.²¹⁷ I thought I might be able to help contribute to the community I was visiting *and* learn at the same time. She chuckled this time, politely brushing off my offer. “Don’t worry, just enjoy!” she said. “At least let me help clean up, then.” This offer for help caused a couple of the other women to chuckle. One of them, Cely, imitated how I would wash the dishes by lazily moving her hands over the air. She said she would have to go back over them and clean them again, essentially doubling the work, and the amount of soap and water. “Men don’t know how to clean,” Cely said as she turned back to her cooking and dropped another order into the hot oil. *Los hombres no saben*. Slightly embarrassed, I left the side door of the kiosko and waited my turn in line to order some food. As I stood in the heat of the sun, I wondered to myself why they would reject my help. It wasn’t—but it felt personal. *I know how to clean!* I thought to myself, trying to convince myself.

Standing there, I noticed something: while María and her colleagues were literally sweating over open flame wood fires, men from the community were sitting at tables or on the ground, eating. Some were even dressed or getting dressed as festival characters, like *el vejigante* and *el caballero*. *Men are not seen in the kitchen, they are seen on the streets*, I thought to myself. Men were having fun, costuming, and enjoying a nice meal. María and her colleagues were crowded into a small kiosk, hidden away. Men were out in the open. Moreover, women were running to and fro with food for husbands and partners. Women were not just cooks but also porters, servers, order taker, and cleaners. La fiesta was not a space of relaxation and

²¹⁷ Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 126.

playfulness for everyone. Relaxation, as non-productive enjoyment (of a meal, a drink, or time with friends), was a form of play that was intended for men.

Alegría argues that this tradition is rooted in the fact that the festival gave men who worked in cane and palm fields, fishing, and other labor-intensive industries the opportunity to “forget their work and daily hardships and actively participate in different ways.”²¹⁸ Notably, there is no season of forgetting for women. Women remember. More than this, women are tasked with the creation of the environment in which men get to forget. This understanding of masculine labor is predicated on the assumption that it is men who are working and thus require time of leisure. However, since Alegría’s seminal research, Loíza’s economy has shifted. Men are no longer working in public-facing, labor-intensive jobs. This is mainly because those industries were abandoned in Loíza as employers moved elsewhere and other parts of the island industrialized more rapidly. Loiceños were left in an even more precarious financial situation, prompting women to enter the workforce.²¹⁹ So, while women were working, mostly in garment industry jobs, men were still considered the head of the house. Yet la fiesta is still considered a place of masculine relaxation.

Part of masculine identity formation, then, in and around la fiesta is based off the notion that men require moments of relaxation—transgression, even. Even if they do not do the same laborious work that Alegría’s research recorded.²²⁰ However, that masculine formation does not occur in private. In this context, masculinity is about *being seen* being playful. Playfulness being

²¹⁸ Algeria, *La fiesta*, 53.

²¹⁹ See Altagracia Ortiz, “Introduction.” In *Puerto Rican Women and Work*, ed. Altagracia Ortiz, 1–32 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

²²⁰ With rapid industrialization on other parts of the island, agricultural work in Loíza quickly faded. Today, Loíza has no specific industry aside from tourism. What draws most people to the city is its reputation as Capital de la Tradición. Most of the tourism industry is concentrated in and administered from Pueblo even though elements of “la tradición” exist outside of Pueblo, in Medianía Alta.

non-productive—even wasteful—practices, such as lounging. This is not the same as Willian pursuing ways of child-like play, though. This masculinist relaxation reproduces the hierarchical structures that Willian’s, *jodedera* (“fuckery”) tried to disrupt. Men, ostensibly, earn their transgression through labor. La loca plays with this dynamic. She is a woman who is not quite a woman doing woman’s work. She is simultaneously doing what she is meant to be doing and doing work not meant for her. Locas transgress whether they work or not.

María made clear to me that a line existed between us where I thought none did. For her, that line is how my gender prohibited me or informed my ability to perform certain domestic tasks, like cooking and cleaning. What informs this logic is a sense that men, at least during festival times, should be resting, relaxing, and having fun. Undoubtedly, María could have simply been being nice to me: someone she barely knew, who she knew was a guest in her country, in her city, and at her church. As an ethnographer, I am hyper aware of how my presence changes an environment and, as much as possible, I try to situate the narratives I share with the assumed understanding that what is being shared is charged with, or affected by, my presence. However charged the scene is by my presence, I am not the only one able to affect the conversation. Indeed, as Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús argues, there is a reciprocal relationship built between ethnographers and their collaborators.²²¹ Therefore, as we, myself and the participants in my research, dialogue, we are both chatting under sets of spoken and unspoken assumptions; we are both charging the discussion in particular ways. As I see it, whatever my status as outsider to the community, it is mitigated by my gender expression. Indeed, this was even the case for me, a researcher and guest in Loíza, who did not do any kind of visible labor and who was not known to the community to be involved in any kind of physical work. My ability to

²²¹ Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería*, 33.

relax and enjoy was read through my gender instead of the other way around, as Alegría found. María's coworker, Cely, made this clear when she said that as a man, I fit into a specific category—foreigner or not. Her generalization, “los hombres no saben,” indicates how she is charging the discussion. María and Cely were not simply being polite, they were telling me about how my gender specified participation. Festival time or not, men do not clean—or, cannot clean. Relaxed masculinity is not simply a festival practice but is quotidian.

La loca muddies this view of masculinity. She is the badly dressed man who is a woman and who does women's work, which, according to Cely, a man does not know how to do. As she sweeps porches and the streets of Loíza, la loca performs work she was never meant to. A contradiction arises in the work la loca performs. As a woman, la loca is implicitly designated with the task of cleaning and cooking. However, as a badly dressed man, she is performing tasks not meant for her. La loca brings with her a can, primed with some coins, to rattle to demand attention (and more coins)—just in case anyone misses the work she is not supposed to be doing in the first place.

What is understood as men's quotidian labor is suspended and in lieu of work, they play. Play functions as a reward for the work men do year around. It is like a release valve in a high-pressure environment. Or at least that is how it is often regarded. The release valve analogy considers play to be something different than the quotidian. However, as I show here, I place non-productivity as a central part of the quotidian. Relaxation is thus not something outside of the ordinary but is foundational. It is not a rarity but something built into the foundation of social constructions of gender and identity. María's and her colleague's responses to my offer of help illustrates the way that women perceive men. Two times María told me to just “enjoy” myself. Cely's comment that I, and other men, are not thorough enough to wash dishes further shapes

how the perception of enjoyability is matched with a blasé attitude toward certain kinds of work. On the one hand, there is no expectation of me to work (María's "enjoy"); and on the other hand, if I do produce any work it would not be of the same quality as a woman's work.

While play has been theorized as the reward for labor, it seems instead that it is gender that marks one as able to play—not labor. Play, as Alegría theorizes, is thought of as a release valve for the labor that men do throughout the year, which is understood as their quotidian behavior. However, there is no specific requirement that men actually produce any labor as evidenced by Cely's comment. Instead, gender is why men are perceived as deserving of play. That is, labor is not what is required of men but rather play. When men play, it is understood as somewhat innate to their gender and deserved. However, when women play, they become locas, like the women who dance in front of La Catedral. Gender, therefore, is a mitigating factor in understanding locura.

La loca, in her gender-bending, blurs this boundary. The men lounging in Loíza were a mild form of the play and transgression that la loca amplifies and intensifies. La loca takes allowable play and stretches it to its limits. Thus, la loca's locura, her anarchistic tendencies, are met with derision, from those like Mónica who argue her behavior tarnishes *real* politics; from men, who castigate locas, telling them to stop fucking around (¡No me jodas más!). Men's quotidian ability to play is not the same as la loca's transgressive play. Though they draw from non-productive and wasteful behavior, la loca's behavior complicates the gendered division of labor, casting doubt over it. The lounging men, however, reinforce the gender binary.

Locura and Boundary Transgression

In front of the main building at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes addressed a group of locas. These locas were protestors, not unlike the locas in front of La Catedral. They were there to *joder*—fuck things up. These locas, a mass crowd of people made up of students, faculty members, and other university workers were gathered together to protest the 2011 austerity measures that included a \$300 million cut to the island’s premier University system, which included all eleven campuses across the island. To help offset these cuts, the University unilaterally fired nearly 17,000 employees. Further, the University moved to change funding structures for students who would otherwise qualify for financial assistance from the university. On top of all of these reductions, the university also planned to increase tuition by 50 percent across the board. All of these austerity measures were announced in April 2010. Students quickly organized a protest and strike. A two-day strike turned into a ten-week long resistance movement. Embers of the original strike flared up again in October 2010 and lasted until February 2011, when La Fountain-Stokes addressed the crowd at the Sit-In/Stand-Up/Lectura protest in front of the iconic belltower at the Río Piedras campus. Months-long resistance, spurred on by “anarcolocos,” provided the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a loca in a university.²²² In his speech to the anarcolocos (“anarchist-crazies”), *maricones*, and *mala-malas*, La Fountain-Stokes addressed used this chance to think about la loca saying:

La loca is life’s teacher and for that reason, la loca teaches—and, oh, how she teaches, instructs and instructs and speaks and speaks until she cannot. How she cleans, polishes, and makes things radiant. How she strives, demands, and cries because sometimes you have to cry, scream, sing, dance—especially with

²²² Rima Brusi, “A New, Violent Order at the University of Puerto Rico,” *Graduate Journal of Social Sciences* 48, no. 1 (2011): 46.

tambourines, drums, the flesh of your hands and body, clapping hands to make noise.²²³

La loca shows us something different about the university, education, and, as La Fountain-Stokes argued, about life. Indeed, as life's teacher, she cries and demands. Like las locas in front of La Catedral, or like the locas who wander around Harlem, they yearn for something different, more, beyond. Or like la loca from la fiesta, who sweeps and cleans and tried to make things brighter. And who demands payment for cleaning. And who drinks and sings uninhibitedly. Often, that yearning can only manifest itself as wild energy, like crying, screaming, or singing. Non-discursive, demonic forms of expression that yearn for otherwise.

The locas in Viejo San Juan and in Loíza, and now in Río Piedras, transgress the boundaries of acceptable and civil behavior as they seek out ways of being in the world. La loca slips through boundaries that seek to limit how one can protest, how productive one should be, or how one's gender shapes their ability to express themselves. The Sanjuanero locas perreod—alone!—in front of a church, in bikinis, no less. They celebrated the trans and gay communities in Puerto Rico in their protest-play. They did not comport with gender and sexual norms. They did not *earn* their transgression through hard work. The locas in Loíza likewise transgress through their gender play. They complicate fixed notions of gender and labor and thereby perform work that is both theirs and not theirs to perform. Locas like these strive for otherwise. Sometimes that otherwise cannot yet be articulated and thus sometimes locas cry, scream, and dance. You will see locas like this walking down calle 187 in Loíza—shouting, laughing, dancing, and enjoying themselves.

Late into the evening on July 24, 2019, Ricardo Rosselló announced that he would step down as governor on August 2, 2019. I was not watching the news when he announced his

²²³ La Fountain-Stokes, “¡Maricones de Río Piedras, Uníos!,” 26.

eventual resignation. However, Mónica quickly called me to tell me the news. “*¡Ricky, pa’ fuera!*” she yelled into the phone. “Ricky, out!” she yelled. Her voice was already raspy. Car horns, people shouting in the streets, and even fireworks accompanied my aunt’s phone call and continued well into the night. In the morning, Sunday, as the kioskos were setting up shop along calle 187, the shirts emblazoned with “*¡Ricky Renuncia!*” held different meaning. They were no longer demanding something; overnight, they had been transformed into artifacts of something already accomplished. This did not stop people from buying them up and wearing them as they paraded eastward toward La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol. The t-shirts were ubiquitous during la fiesta. The shirt cemented the effort of the Puerto Rican people to hold their government accountable.

The political t-shirts wore by Loiceños during the procession of images down calle 187 makes clear that there is no easy separation between the supposedly “religious” and the “secular.” Indeed, as Ana-Maurine Lara’s “Christian coloniality” makes clear, there is an imbrication of constructions of gender, sexuality, and theology in public spaces. La loca is the manifestation of the supposedly secular, that which is said to reside outside of “religion” within a religious festival. As she makes her way eastward along 187, she exceeds the restrictions of these categories, though. La loca inhabits and multiplies a marginal space that is then occupied, almost inadvertently, by those wearing a t-shirt with the multiply-signifying slogan that portended itself. Because of the space she moves in, wearing such a shirt in the midst of a religious procession should be expected. In fact, during a Mass said at La Parroquia Santiago Apóstol, Padre Orlando Bonilla asked the congregation what Santiago might say to us today. Someone in the congregation yelled out, “*¡Que Ricky Renuncia!*” to the delight of the congregation. La loca blurs the boundaries between these two supposed mutually exclusive terrains. She reveals their already

networked relationship, takes advantage of it, and likewise allows others to take advantage of that connection.

Conclusion

This chapter theorized la loca and locura as a method of protest-play that seeks otherwise. Combining the theories of “wildness” and “anarchy” developed by Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong’o, and Saidiya Hartman, respectively, I positioned locura as a form of unruly, anarchistic political philosophy that seeks otherwise. From the 1998 statehood plebiscite I developed the “ninguna de las anteriores” option that won the popular vote a way of expressing the dissatisfaction with the current state of the world that does not offer a solution or a plan. Instead, ninguna de las anteriores is the purposeful leaning into madness and performance as a way of pointing to madness of the problems. Together, otherwise and ninguna de las anteriores are a way of pursuing life in the ways that one can in a world that seeks to erase those possibilities.

Through Willian, I argued that la loca’s locura was a method of playfulness and pleasure-seeking that was not interested in something bigger than pleasure. Willian expressed that la loca was a way for him to play with consequence, like he was able to as a child. When I asked why he likes to have fun, he was not sure how to answer such a question. *What is it about fun that needs a reason?* he must have thought. Willian relied on joder, a flexible word that moves between playfulness and fucking around and often collapses them together. Willian collapses these as la loca. He oversteps boundaries in his flirtatiousness and his gender-bending performances.

Not everyone gets a chance to joder, though. Women, specifically, are tasked with creating and maintaining environments in which men can joder. By relaxing and lounging, men participate in what mean seem like a mild form of la loca’s locura. However, their mild form

reifies the boundaries that la loca seeks to efface. As I sat with María and Cely as they cooked, they showed me that men are not meant to be in certain spaces, like the kitchen. Instead, men should be outside, enjoying themselves. María and Cely made it clear in different ways that I did not belong in the kitchen because of my gender expression. The joder that is available to all men, that is, their ability to relax, is something la loca takes up and exaggerates. She plays into roles she is both meant to and not meant to play and thereby disrupts the order of things.

Ultimately, la loca's jodedera reveals a different way of being in the world that is really a becoming. To joder is to seek and to find pleasure where and how one can, it is to constantly be on the move, and to is to be dissatisfied with the insufficient options.

CHAPTER 4: THE MAD ATLANTIC

*Upside, inside out
She's livin' la vida loca
She'll push and pull you down
Livin' la vida loca
Her lips are devil red
And her skin's the color mocha
She will wear you out
Livin' la vida loca
—Ricky Martin²²⁴*

Of Monsters and “Men” (Or, Madness: A Trans Theory)

The creature in Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* followed its creator through the snowy mountains of Chamounix seeking an audience with him.²²⁵ In the novel, Dr. Victor Frankenstein stitched together bits and pieces of human remains and created life from where there was none. En route to his goal, he compared himself to other scientists: “More, far more, will I achieve. I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.”²²⁶ While other scientists were ostensibly satisfied with examining life, Frankenstein endeavored to *create* life. However, such pursuits are not without their own dangers.

In his search for godlike status, Dr. Frankenstein inadvertently created monstrosity instead of humanity. As Susan Stryker puts it: the creature Frankenstein created “exceeds and

²²⁴ “Livin’ la Vida Loca,” Spotify, track 1 on Ricky Martin, *Ricky Martin*, Columbia Records, 1999.

²²⁵ In Susan Stryker’s reading of *Frankenstein*, she uses the pronoun *it* to refer to the monster. For example: “*It* would have been happy to destroy all of Nature, but *it* settles.” See Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 3 (1994): 243; emphasis mine. I have here repeated that custom. Stryker’s use (and now mine) raises interesting questions about pronouns for the non-human and the way that their use (or absence) can extend or refuse modes of being.

²²⁶ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Signet, 1965), 46.

refutes his purposes.”²²⁷ That is, the creature is not received as perfected creation—no, quite the opposite: the creature is the antithesis of humanity. What he created was an abomination and at the first hints of movement and speech, Frankenstein ran away, scared for his own life. Frankenstein and his fellow townspeople abhorred the creature and sought to end its “not-quite-life.” In response, the monster grew bitter and angry and killed Frankenstein’s beloved. Eventually, the creature runs away, silently watching, and following Frankenstein.

Similarly, Susan Stryker confronted her creator at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). She, too, desired a meeting with those who create humans and monsters. Her Chamounix is San Francisco; her Dr. Frankenstein is the APA itself, which had just designated transsexuality a mental disorder. Trans people were mad, they said. Locas, even. She was at the Association meeting to partake in a direct action, a method of living otherwise. She, like *la loca* during *la fiesta*, was there to disrupt and interrupt business as usual. More than this, her madness was her rage, like the sadness and anger experienced by Frankenstein’s creature. Stryker writes: “A good deal of the discussion at our planning meetings concerned how to harness the intense emotions emanating from transsexual experience—especially rage—and mobilize them into effective political actions.”²²⁸ Madness: transness, grief, anger.

Stryker had read the academic journals of the doctors and supposed allies alike. She had seen how doctors regarded her transness as a “psycho-medical pathologization.”²²⁹ Or, how gay

²²⁷ Stryker, “My Words,” 242.

²²⁸ Stryker, “My Words,” 237.

²²⁹ Susan Stryker, “Transing the Queer (In)Human,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 227.

and lesbian community members regarded her as “a self-made freak, a deformity, an insult.”²³⁰ Rejected (or, abjected) by doctors and her community, she empathizes with the monster in Shelley’s novel. Indeed, she says: “I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster.”²³¹ The Nature that she is at war with proclaims that life is not stitched together, like hers is or other trans people’s skin is. Nature is whole, unformed. The transsexual person, on the other hand, is stitched together, created. Their skin bears the marks of hormone injections, top surgery, or facial feminization surgery. As such, they are constructed—not natural. Monstrosity, then, is to “unnaturally” formed. Locas, like Stryker, are unnaturally formed.

This chapter considers the multiple slippages in Stryker’s protest. Specifically, I draw from the murder of Alexa, a trans woman, in Puerto Rico in February 2020. To date, her murder is unsolved. One of the main pieces of evidence in the investigation is a video filmed on a smartphone wherein suspects, perhaps her killers, filmed themselves harassing Alexa hours before she is found dead. Among other things, her assailants called her “loca,” taking up in their own terms the “psycho-pathologization” and derogatory language Stryker set out to confront. The audio reveals one of her harassers, and likely murderers, correcting the other, telling him “*el loco*” as in, “No, not *loca*, ‘he’ is *loco*.” Alexa’s life and death illustrate the way that “loca” gets deployed as the “biopolitical management of both craziness and homosexuality, two subjectivities that have been historically relegated to a position of otherness.”²³²

I turn next to examine what the desire to correct does. Drawing from the assailant’s correction of “loco,” I argue that such correctives make a distinction between what is seen as

²³⁰ Stryker, “My Words,” 239.

²³¹ Stryker, “My Words,” 240.

²³² González, “La Loca,” 123.

different than “reality” upon which the performed is cast. In this section, I turn to Judith Butler’s theory of gender construction and performativity to think about the ways hegemonic forces fabricate a supposedly “pre-ideological” (“real”) subjectivity in order to then subjectify individuals. Using Butler and performance theorist Richard Schechner, I argue here that what is performed is all we have. Meaning, there is no “reality” behind performances. Instead, performances like Willian’s performance of *la loca*, for example, are not separate parts of the individual; these performances are part and parcel of what makes Willian Willian. Performance is all we have.

From there, I consider how performances comes to be “more real” than reality. In this section, I turn to Friedrich Nietzsche’s “death of God” to think about the relationship between certainty and possibility. Locas, like Alexa and Stryker, seemingly announce the death of God, like Nietzsche’s madman. The madman announces something that is contextually understood to be universally held and yet the announcement elicits mockery and refusal. Likewise, trans people re-announce the death of God—that is, the infinite horizon of possibilities that are sometimes scary. Yet, they too are mocked and ridiculed.

In the last section, I tie together these elements to re-conceptualize *where* exactly *la loca* is located. I bring together theorists of the Black Atlantic like Paul Gilroy, Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, and Christina Sharpe with trans* theorists like Jack Halberstam and C. Riley Snorton to re-think the “Black Atlantic.” Combining and re-combining them, I theorize this space as the “Mad Atlantic.” This chapter, then, further extends *la loca* and *locura* as mapped in the preceding chapters to instances and events outside of *la fiesta* proper.

Transness and Locura

During la fiesta, “loca” is said with a sense of affection or levity. However, on any other day, to be called “loca” while walking down the street is to be accosted. In Puerto Rico, there are multiple words for these kinds of locas: *pato*, *pájaro*, and *mariposa* among them. Duck, bird, and butterfly. Beyond these animalistic categories exist other forms of derision: *loca* and *maricón* among them. Madwoman (bitingly sarcastic) and faggot, respectively. The use of “loca” in this context is meant to at once acknowledge the presumed femininity on display while at the same time undermine the performer with the gendered loca (“a” terminal vowel), instead of loco (“o”), for example. While some of these words are seemingly neutral in their meaning, their usage is actually quite “disconcerting and at times a traumatic event, for it is to be marked as *queer*, strange, different, sexually or gender non-compliant, or simply marginal.”²³³

Such was the case with Alexa, a trans woman killed in Puerto Rico in February 2020. She was marked as strange, queer, sexually deviant. She was marked as loca. The following is a summary of the events of Alexa’s locura, what led to her death, and the aftermath of her murder.

*

“*¡Mira la loca!*” one of them shouted. “Look, la loca!” The video is grainy and unsteady. Imagine, if you can: it was very late, somewhere around 2 am on Monday, February 24, 2020. Aside from bars, nothing else was open. Of the streetlights that were left after María, only a few of them worked. There was no other source of light other than the headlights of their car. A group of men had been driving around Toa Baja all night, looking for their target, la loca, and finally she appeared. *Look!* His voice was a mixture of disgust, delight, and exasperation.

²³³ Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, “Queer Ducks, Puerto Rican Patos, and Jewish-American Feygelekh: Birds and the Cultural Representation of Homosexuality,” *CENTRO* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 194.

The loca they gawked at was not la loca of Loíza. “*El loco, el loco,*” corrected another. The *madman*. Emphasis was put on the “el” and the “o” of loco. Even if “loca” was said mockingly, the second voice could not let the gendered “loca” abide—it had to be corrected. He had to reveal “the truth”—that she was an *extraordinary* woman, something beyond woman. “*Mira, te vamos entarrar a tiros,*” threatened another. “Look, we’re going to riddle you with bullets,” he said. At least ten gunshots can be heard on the recording. The imposed text across the bottom of their video read: “*Aquí tienen el video.*” “Here’s the video.” The killers, proud of their actions, uploaded the video to social media so everyone else could see what they had done.

On Sunday, February 23, 2020, Alexa Negrón Luciano went into the bathroom at a McDonald’s in Toa Baja, a city to the west of San Juan. By the time she came out, a small group was gathered outside the bathroom, some of them filmed, some simply gawked, and others hurled insults. According to police reports, a customer had called the police saying that a man dressed as a woman had entered the women’s bathroom and was spying on women in the bathroom. Those who filmed her immediately put the video on social media. As soon as the videos made it online, there were already threats against her life. “She is dangerous,” they said. “She needs help. She has mental health problems,” others said.²³⁴ Eventually another video surfaced. In the second video, several men filmed themselves harassing Alexa. They hurled insults, asked if she was a sex worker, and asked to see her genitals. Given the sound of gunshots heard on the video, it is presumed that they fired wildly at and around Alexa. On February 24, 2020, at around 4 am, her body was found in a field not far from where she was filmed being harassed. She had multiple gunshot wounds. It was her birthday. She had just turned 29.

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²³⁴ David Begnaud, “Transgender Woman Murdered in Puerto Rico was Harassed Before Killing.” *CBS This Morning*, March 2, 2020, YouTube video, 5:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctOc7APXALU>.

Alexa was Black, unhoused, poor, and, unfortunately, used to being assaulted. She carried a mirror with her as she walked around Toa Baja for protection by using it to see what was coming behind her.²³⁵ Mirrors were also a medium on which she expressed herself. “I am pretty and feminine enough for you, motherf**kers,” she scrawled on a bathroom mirror once.²³⁶ “Don’t please this sh*t society, please yourself.”²³⁷ In another instance, she wrote on a mirror: “I always wanted to travel, but not like this.”²³⁸ The mirrors she used for expression and protection were turned against her when someone in the McDonald’s accused her of using it to spy on women, an accusation that was proven to be untrue.²³⁹ Instead, the assemblage of a trans woman and a mirror could only mean impropriety. As a trans woman, Alexa was a threat—before she even did anything. The mirror, Alexa’s expressive and protective appendage, must then be a threat, too. She threatened the received order of things. She threatened the reality and stability of gender; of who one should desire and how they should desire them. She was turned into a monster, a predator, and something to fear.

In the wake of her murder, queer and trans communities of Puerto Rico gathered in Viejo San Juan to mourn their loved one. Unlike the protests documented in Chapter Three, the vigil for Alexa was a time to cry and grieve because words failed. The summer’s chants of “*¡Soy pata, soy puta, pero nunca corrupta!*” were nowhere to be found. There was no perreo. No reggaetón. No Spiderman. Summer 2019’s locura was transformed into a different locura: anger and grief.

²³⁵ David Begnaud, “Transgender Woman Murdered in Puerto Rico.”

²³⁶ Jhoni Jackson, “Remembering Alexa, A Transgender Puerto Rican Woman Whose Tragic Story We Can All Learn From,” *Remezcla*, March 5, 2020, <https://remezcla.com/features/culture/remembering-alex-puerto-rican-transgender-woman/>.

²³⁷ Jackson, “Remembering Alexa.”

²³⁸ Jackson, “Remembering Alexa.”

²³⁹ David Begnaud, “Transgender Woman Murdered in Puerto Rico.”

They were mad. One could not help but cry seeing the images of balloons for her birthday, friends crying, and flowers and gifts left behind where guillotines processed months earlier. There was a birthday cake for Alexa. They sang “Happy Birthday.” Mirrors painted with likenesses of Alexa and inspirational messages written on them, mirroring her own messages to herself and the world. “*Justicia + paz*” read one. “Justice and peace.” “*Ya eres libre*” read another. “You are finally free.”

Alexa’s life and death point to the ways that systems of power seek to control and maintain. The problem for the doctors at the APA (or the townspeople in the Shelley’s novel or the Toabajeños who murdered Alexa), is that they see themselves as non-stitched. That is, they see themselves as “natural.” Stryker puts it succinctly when she writes: “The affront you humans take at being called a ‘creature’ results from the threat the term poses to your status as ‘lords of creation,’ being elevated above mere material existence.”²⁴⁰ Medical doctors, Stryker argues, occupy a godlike position insofar as they are creators of life, which is understood as “natural” and unmanufactured. Trans people (locas) like Alexa and Stryker confront and challenge the supposed naturalness of life. The naturalness of the doctors, Shelley’s townspeople, or Alexa’s murderer, assumes superiority to that which is manufactured.

Recall, Stryker is at a medical-academic association meeting as part of a direct action. Can you see her? Sitting in hotel conference room? Chairs all faced forward. The attendees expecting to hear from the esteemed Dr. Frankenstein about the newest revelations from his research into human life. Instead, they are met with the “Harley-straddling, dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell.”²⁴¹ Imagine the confusion, the frustration. Imagine, the other panelists

²⁴⁰ Stryker, “My Words,” 240.

²⁴¹ Stryker, “My `Words,” 239.

with their arms folded behind the center table, Hilton Hotel pens and coasters strewn on the table, anxiously shuffling through their presentation. Can you similarly see la loca? Wandering around Loíza? Lawn chairs facing calle 187, the crowd looking to see the sacred images of Santiago processing from church to church? Instead, they are met with locura. Locas, like Stryker, indeed go around interrupting. They interrupt conversations along calle 187. They interrupt the boundaries of home and public. They open the gate to enter people's property, demanding money for unrequested work. However, they are not just there to interrupt but also to *disrupt*. They disrupt by gratuitously flirting with procession watchers and processors alike. Disrupt with her unreasonably large breasts and buttock. She is there to sow seeds of doubt about one's sexuality, about gender, and about what "religion" might be. Stryker continues:

the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. *You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both.* I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.²⁴²

Do not trust "Nature," (capital n), she says. That which you attempt to thrust upon the mad-monster, she simultaneously renounces and casts back. "Nature" is itself a fabrication. There is nothing natural, she says. She raises her voice: *Look at your skin and you will see you are as stitched together as I am!* Cis people see trans people's scars, or see a mirror, and think "monster." For cis people, they look at their skin and do not see scars of creation and think themselves Natural. Stryker argued that should they look more closely and more critically, they would indeed see the scars and the stitches that hold them together. Likewise, la loca raises her voice and asks Loiceños to consider their scars. "I seek payment!" she shouts. "Consider," she

²⁴² Stryker, "My Words," 240–1; emphasis mine.

might say, “how you have been stitched together from a disparate group of body parts: African, European, and Indigenous ancestry, cosmologies, and practices. How their ‘race’ and ‘religion’ feel Natural but, if you look closely, you can see the folds of the skin where externalities have been internalized, where that which was ‘not you’ is indeed you.”



Figure 5.1 Puerto Rican trappero Bad Bunny wearing a shirt reading “They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt” during his performance on the Jimmy Fallon Show on February 27, 2020. Photo by Andrew Lipovsky/NBC/NBCU Photo Bank via Getty Images.

Gender and “‘The’ ‘Real’”

“El loco, el loco,” he said. The man who corrected his accomplice while they harassed Alexa wanted to reveal the “truth.” His friend had just misgendered Alexa: she was “actually” a man and his friend needed to know. Irony on top of irony. His friend had just properly gendered Alexa in his attempt to undermine her by calling her a loca; however, that was not *really* her gender. “El loco,” he snapped back at his friend. The desire to reveal the truth, to pull back the curtain, as it were, maintains that there is something more real than what is revealed. That is to say, what is revealed is the façade constructed around reality and said façade can align or cannot align with said reality. Her assailants and likely murderers concluded that Alexa’s façade did not align with her reality. However, in her death, Alexa revealed more about this relationship between façade and reality than their assailants could have ever hoped to have achieved by

killing her. Indeed, Alexa's death brings into stark juxtaposition the relationship between performance and reality. If Alexa's life and gender were anything other than a fiction, why go to such lengths to reveal it to be? Killing her was about maintaining certainty in the face of uncertainty, it was about marking clear boundaries. Alexa, like Frankenstein's monster or like Stryker, challenged society's closely held notion of certainty. Her murderers' vision was slowly coming into focus, perhaps, and they could slowly begin to see the seams and sutures in their own skin. In killing her they revealed the truth of her performance. They were not killing the "lie" that they said her performance was. Indeed, they were confirming the potential of her performance. Her performance was creating and establishing unthought-of possibilities.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* puts forward a similar argument about the nature of reality and performance. While her text is specifically about the nature of feminist politics, she lays out a provocative argument about the very subject of feminism that is helpful for understanding the corrective that Alexa's harassers deployed. In her assessment of contemporary feminist politics, Butler argued that that which is said to be central to feminist philosophy might not be as stable and as universal as it is presumed to be: "woman." This category, she contended, should rather be understood in the same way that we have come to understand gender. Which is to say that that which has been understood to be "reality" (sex) has in fact been performance (gender). Ultimately, she said, that "sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along."²⁴³ Indeed, it is performance all the way down.

Butler makes two moves. The first is to describe how the law functions in society. Butler uses "law" as an elastic category that encompasses anyone who is sovereign over a particular

²⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 12.

domain.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, she takes up Foucauldian language of the “juridical” to think about how law is also declarative.²⁴⁵ The sovereign, therefore, is not only “in control” but *controls through* pronouncement. In her assessment, the law does two things. Firstly, the law creates a fiction, what she calls “the subject before the law.”²⁴⁶ “Before the law” meaning prior to the law, a temporal category. This “subject” is said to exist outside of and prior to any control or declaration. After that fiction has been created, the law covers over this and pretends to not have created the fiction, which is the supposed subject prior to the law. She continues: “the performative invocation of a non-historical ‘before’ becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons.”²⁴⁷ Important to note here is that the law, in creating the presocial subject, has to define the “presocial subject.” Patterson similarly argues that this is what happens in constructions of the category enslaved.²⁴⁸ Perhaps such a definition is not (yet) juridical but it is at least linguistic and in doing so has had to already set out what the supposedly presocial subject is, which is then included in what will later be covered in the post-juridical pronouncement. Thus, the law is simultaneously producing subjects and then eliding that production. By covering over the fiction, the law has the ability to pretend that what is encountered is pre-given or natural—Natural, even. This is the Nature that Stryker refers to above in her reading of *Frankenstein*.²⁴⁹ The supposedly sutureless human is the presocial human that Butler refers to here.

²⁴⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

²⁴⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.

²⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

²⁴⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

²⁴⁸ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 36.

²⁴⁹ Stryker, “My Words,” 240.

In her second move, Butler applied this argument to think about the categories of sex and gender. The law, she says, produces “women,” a social category. That is, from “law” comes the category “woman.” Sex produces the category woman. Under such conditions, the category “woman” appears to be natural and pre-given because law elides their production of “sex.” Thus, “sex” appears as the natural order of things because of the law’s elision. The reality, though, is that sex is not stable. Her theoretical intervention highlights that that which goes into defining the presocial self does not adhere to its own logic, which is the supposedly ante-judicial. Butler writes: “If one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered ‘person’ transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because *gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities.*”²⁵⁰ Later she adds: “And what is ‘sex’ anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal... Does sex have a history?”²⁵¹ The supposedly “Natural” is actually an amalgamation of non-natural categories and procedures that coalesce around the subject. They are stitched together, like Frankenstein’s monster. Taken together, her two points reveal at once sex’s inadequacy of a term meant to describe something that we are told to be presocial.

She goes further. Gender, we are told, is the social manifestation of the universal fact of sex, of law, or of Nature. However, if, as she has argued, sex is constructed in the same way we are told that gender is, then “perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.”²⁵² In taking the universal

²⁵⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6; emphasis mine.

²⁵¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10.

²⁵² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9–10.

fact, “sex,” and arguing that it is socially constructed, Butler collapses the sex/gender distinction. However, her further claim is that behind the workings of “sex” is actually gender. That is, that gender has been the thing shaping sex. It has always been the performance (gender) that has guided and shaped the construction of so-called “reality” (sex). The performed is not less real than reality but it is all we have.

Butler’s argument highlights an important distinction (or lack thereof) for us and for locas, like Alexa and Willian, between the performed and the real. Some might want to read Willian’s performance as something separate from what he does on a daily basis with the idea that the daily basis is “more real” than what he performs during la fiesta. Similarly, that the doctor’s prescriptive pronouncement of Alexa’s sex (or, better, gender) at birth is more real than how she lived. In either case, the performance is a veneer applied to reality. The assumption here is that what is performed is somehow paused outside of real time and exists in its own time. However, Butler’s argument shows that Alexa’s and Willian’s performance is just as real as what supposedly undergirds them. Or, as Richard Schechner has put it: the really real is really “make-belief.”²⁵³ Reality, the supposedly “really real,” in which we live does not exist in the Ideal, which “only existed as pure forms.”²⁵⁴ Instead, “make-belief” suggests that “reality” is made up of the actions and behaviors that constitute life. Schechner writes: “The many performances of everyday life such as professional roles, gender and race roles, and shaping one’s identity are not ‘make-believe’ actions (as playing a role on a stage or in a film most probably). The performances of everyday life... ‘make-belief’—create the very social realities they enact.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013), 42.

²⁵⁴ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 15.

²⁵⁵ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 42.

This means that Willian's performance of la loca is not to be seen as separate and distinct from his "normal life." His normal life (the supposed "really real") is part and parcel to the production of his performance of la loca. Likewise, his performance of la loca is linked relationally to his other performances, such as delivering pizzas for Pizza Hut or making *cafecitos* in the panedería. His performance of la loca is just as real as the supposed normalcy of his quotidian life. Indeed, his performances form and regulate his normal life such that "normal" loses all meaning and we do not have to think about what exists before (a fiction anyway) or what will exist after (indeterminable). What matters is what is happening. The "truth" that is presumed to be behind any performance is contained in the performance; it is not outside of it or prior to it. Performance reveals; it does not cover up. Similarly, with Alexa and Stryker, the supposed reality behind their "make-believe" gender performances matters not in the face of their make-belief gender. Attempts to uphold the order of things, through murder or psycho-medical pathologization, reveal something more: that the attempt to negate does not achieve anything. Maybe even less than nothing.

Likewise, it might be easy to understand the drag of la loca during la fiesta as a kind of "covering" over of reality. That her gender-bending performances somehow are a façade. However, with Butler, we should understand performances of la loca as reality. Performances of the Black-black woman from Loíza do not cover over Black Puerto Rican women's reality. No, instead they point to that reality, of the socially imagined woman as mad, marginalized, sexually deviate, obscene, irreligious. This is not to say that personification is without problem, though. As explored in the previous chapter, women exist in a subordinated role in Puerto Rican society. Likewise, la loca embodies this. As Zaragoza argues, "Today's gay males, who are 'dirt' in their own society, take on the posture of women who are themselves unequal to men. Though sadly

foolish, today's gay male takes on the role of the subservient woman in Puerto Rican society. In so doing he not only questions that role, but he also inverts his own status, making for himself a temporary place among those who ordinarily revile him."²⁵⁶

Transness and the Death of God

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* is a peculiar text that moves in a series of mad aphorisms ranging in length, style, and content. Infamously, it is also the place where Nietzsche, through a madman, announces the death of God—or, the supposed death of God. Where the announcement of the death of God is taken to mean that it is in fact a past event, the madman reveals that perhaps the event is some time off. That the death of God might not have actually occurred yet (perhaps it might not ever). The death of God is about the proclamation of a supposed truth that is universally held. However, as the madman reveals, God is perhaps not dead at all and instead we have become gods ourselves in the process. The death of God, then, is less about the actual death of God and is more about the consequences of thinking we have unchained ourselves from the last Absolute.

In aphorism 125 of Book Three, a madman enters the marketplace, with a lantern lit and “held high in the blazing sun.”²⁵⁷ The madman seemingly runs from merchant to merchant, stall to stall, overturning wares and produce, looking high and low. Finally, he cries: “I am looking for God! I am looking for God!”²⁵⁸ Imagine here *la loca*, wandering the streets of Loíza: “I’m

²⁵⁶ Zaragoza, *St. James in the Streets*, 127.

²⁵⁷ Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

²⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119.

looking for payment! I'm looking for payment!" as she sweeps and rattles her tin can. The madman's irony a lantern at midday; la loca's, her multiple redundancies. To the bemused shoppers and sellers in the marketplace, the madman with the lantern in the middle of the day and looking for God could be nothing but mad. To Loiceños, the mad Black-black woman, in her nightgown and slippers, sweeping and demanding payment could be nothing but mad. The shoppers in the marketplace mock Nietzsche's madman: "Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated?"²⁵⁹ This is not unlike my own negotiations with the madwoman at my door during la fiesta. Frustrated, the madman, without missing a beat, asks again—this time, revealing that he was not actually looking for God but was rather there to announce something. "I'll tell you! *We have killed him—you and I!*"²⁶⁰ However, the madman does not take this lightly: killing God is treacherous business. He continues:

But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again?²⁶¹

The death of God—indeed, the murder of God—comes with consequences that we ourselves are not ready for: infinite horizon, space, and night. With the death of God, we have unchained ourselves from the supposedly uncreated Nature, says the madman. Law has been killed. Sex is no more. The madman's questions reveal the uncertainty caused by the death—murder!—of

²⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119.

²⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119–120; emphasis original.

²⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 120.

God. And this uncertainty is scary. Just before this, in aphorism 124, Nietzsche compares the experience of this uncertainty to being out to sea, having destroyed the dock, and land the dock was attached to. “Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is ocean...[and] there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity.”²⁶² When the dock is destroyed and the land behind it, too, where does one sail? Indeed, where *can* one sail? What does sailing even mean with no port or land to go to? Infinity is scary. What does one do in the face of such infinity? Attempt to build land on the sea, of course. That is, build certainty when and where one can.

The madman in 125 (or la loca on 187), after wondering aloud about what has just occurred, now asks instead of what has happened, *how* could this have been accomplished. He asks, “Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?”²⁶³ What could be powerful enough to get rid of the horizon itself? Could a mere mortal kill a god? God, even? In the face of the uncertainty of the sea, we create land. What more: we become gods through the murder of God. Whereas there was a time when people looked to God for answers, reason, certainty, we now look to ourselves. Nietzsche calls these “festivals of atonement [and] holy games.”²⁶⁴ To atone for the sin of killing god, we create elaborate rituals to a host of new gods. We give these gods names like “Biology,” “Law,” “Nature,” or “the Subject.” This is the Butlerian elision: the covering over of the act with another name for the same. It is not so much that God is dead, then, but rather that we have replaced God with another. “God” is removed but we still see his effects. Though God is removed (killed) his shadow still appears in the halls of

²⁶² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119.

²⁶³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 120.

²⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 120.

academia, in birthing wards of hospitals, or in the streets of Toa Baja. Shadows of God. Where certainty is removed, the scary infinite demands a new certainty to fill its place. Indeed, as Michael Taussig argues: “God is not the problem. Killing him achieved nothing. Maybe less than nothing.”²⁶⁵ Instead of killing God, we have actually made God (and subsequent gods) more powerful than the last. Taussig continues: “defacement was not just ineffectual but added new power to the target.”²⁶⁶ “Defacement,” what Taussig calls the Nietzschean madman’s announcement of the death of God, does not *actually* negate; no, negation simply reifies that which is negated. Biology, Nature, or the Subject become more powerful than God himself.

Important to note here is that the death of God is not yet realized—not yet actualized *and* not yet noticed. Law, Sex, the Subject persist. “‘I come too early,’ he then said; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard.’”²⁶⁷ The Event, the death of God, is not yet. It is at this moment in Nietzsche’s aphorism that the madman’s façade, his lantern at midday, gets smashed to the ground. For those who destroyed dock and land and then searched furiously for something to cling to are like “the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of [a] cage.”²⁶⁸ Locas, like Nietzsche’s madman, Alexa, or Stryker, announce the death of God to an audience of people who have already agreed that God is dead. However, when confronted with the accusation that they have created land in the middle of ocean, the vanguards of the death

²⁶⁵ Taussig, *Defacement*, 8.

²⁶⁶ Taussig, *Defacement*, 28.

²⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 120.

²⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 119.

of God react—violently, sometimes. The lantern has been smashed to the ground, the façade is over, la fiesta is over, and we can return again to the order of things.

The Nietzschean Event and its subsequent events offer the opportunity to think critically about trans studies. Locas, like Alexa, are harbingers of the death of God, like Nietzsche's madman. They announce new possibilities, scary possibilities, unthought-of-possibilities. It is here, in this place of infinite possibility that I draw a connection to trans studies. "Trans" here, though, needs to be read capaciously. For some time now, trans has been read as a unilateral movement from one knowable and stable gender identity to another. That is, one is assigned one gender at birth and a trans person transitions to the *other* gender. This, however, has changed. "Trans" is now theorized as a more complex experience of movement without destination, like Nietzsche's little ship with no dock and no land. Consider what C. Riley Snorton said writing about trans: it is a "movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival."²⁶⁹ Trans, then, is about movement and fungibility rather than about clear and direct transformation. The death of God, then, with regard to trans studies is a way of thinking about the open possibilities.

The Mad Atlantic: The Black, Queer, Trans* Atlantic

At the outset of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault charts the shifting waters of the containment of social outcasts. For a period of time, he argued, people with leprosy served as manifestations of that which must be contained. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, Foucault contends, their containment was imagined as separation at the limits of

²⁶⁹ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2.

the city.²⁷⁰ Hospitals, ghettos, and the like were established as means of keeping the healthy and sick separated. Later, during the Classical Age, the leper was superseded by the “deranged,” who were grouped together with the financially destitute and the lawless in their shared need to be contained.²⁷¹ In the Classical Age, the deranged were not simply sick but were also “violators of specific social norms,” and their madness was considered a moral failing.²⁷² However, these could not be contained in the same way. No, instead, the mad must be contained *outside* the city. Foucault argues that the mad were handed over to sailors to be contained on a ship as a method of forcing them outside the limits of civilization and into the wildness of the ocean. The ships that contained the mad were known as, or imagined as, “Ships of Fools.”²⁷³ No longer were the mad part of society, even if tangentially. Instead, the mad were cast off and shipped away. Unlike the stationary ghettos, the ships, by their nature, moved. These ships, he says, “conveyed their insane cargo from town to town.”²⁷⁴ The mad, then, were mobile subjects (or objects, even).

Of this scene, La Marr Jurelle Bruce writes: “Foucault describes a tragic diaspora of madness: a scattering of captive beings across sovereign borders and over bodies of water, inciting dispossession, abjection, and also novel subjectivities that transgress Western codes of sanity and sovereignty.”²⁷⁵ Ultimately, Bruce is interested in the relationship between the

²⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2001), 24–25.

²⁷¹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 5.

²⁷² Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 71.

²⁷³ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 5.

²⁷⁴ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 6. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, in a parenthetical aside, notes that the ship in Foucault might not have been an actual method of dealing with the mad but takes delight in the slippage between reality and fiction: “(How apropos if the foolish ship turns out to be Foucault’s phantasm, a philosopher’s exquisite delusion!)” See La Marr Jurelle Bruce, “Mad is a Place; or, The Slave Ship Tows the Ship of Fools,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017): 304.

²⁷⁵ Bruce, “Mad is a Place,” 303.

containment and shipment of the mad in Foucault's history and the containment and shipment of enslaved Africans during the Middle Passage. Quoting Hortense Spillers, Bruce connected the Ship of Fools to the slave ships: "'Removed from [their] indigenous land and culture, and not-yet 'American' either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all.'"²⁷⁶ Like Nietzsche's little ship, the mad were moving—but to where? There is a slippage Bruce noted between the mad cargo of Foucault's history and the movement of human cargo across the Atlantic. In both cases, he argues, the mad and the enslaved are envisioned as abjection that requires reallocation. The enslaved, then, are figured in Bruce as the mad. Thus, to be Black is to be mad. Or, to be mad is to be Black. Insofar as blackness and madness share and partake in histories of abjection, isolation, and movement. This is not to say they are the same. Instead, they are in relation, tightly entangled, and networked. Like the oceanic waters that connect Africa, the Americas, and Europe. These same waters contain the history of the movement of the mad and the enslaved. Thus, the Black Atlantic has always been the Mad Atlantic.

To say that the Black Atlantic has always been the Mad Atlantic is to draw together the multiple, aqueous histories of the Atlantic. Specifically, I am interested in the history of the Black Atlantic as the queer Atlantic, the place of possibility where no possibility could seem to exist. In this sense, I frame the Black Atlantic as a becoming. It is the abyss that is full of potential. More than this, though, "Mad Atlantic" is a way of attending to the relationship between madness (*locura*) and blackness. Specifically, how *la loca*'s networking of blackness and madness flirts with the demonic. This type of madness, non-teleological madness, is a form of evasion and movement without destination and without origin. Like the waters of the Atlantic

²⁷⁶ Bruce, "Mad is a Place," 303; emphasis original.

that are in a constant state of flux, blackness imagined here is a constant state of flux. This movement, without origin and without destination, is trans as Snorton theorized above. In this final section, I am interested in how this confluence of madness manifests itself trans experiences and blackness. Locura slips over the edges of that which seeks to contain it, just like the waters that carry the ships cannot be contained. More than this though: madness is grief, rage, anger. Madness is also trans-ness—trans*ness, even.

For Paul Gilroy, the “Black Atlantic” was a way of thinking about the resulting knowledges and practices in the wake of the Middle Passage. Invoking W.E.B. DuBois, he argued that the Black Atlantic was a “heuristic” through which he attempted to articulate what it means “to face (at least) two ways at once.”²⁷⁷ That is, what does it mean, in his case, to be Black and British? In Alexa’s case: what does it mean to be Black and trans? To be Black and Puerto Rican? The problem that Gilroy uncovered was that dominant narratives of culture and race structured these two, blackness and Britishness, as mutually exclusive terrains. He continues: “This has become the dominant view where black [sic] history and culture are perceived, like black [sic] settlers themselves, as illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life.”²⁷⁸ Black people are as an intrusion into (white) British life, into the supposedly “natural.” Black people are, thus, outside of British life. The Black Atlantic, then, attends to the ways that Black people have always been a part of British history. The Black Atlantic is an entanglement. What are perceived to be mutually exclusive categories are instead intricately tied together through sutures and connections.

²⁷⁷ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 3.

²⁷⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 7.

Beyond a framework for understanding culture, the Black Atlantic is also a place where material actions take place and relationships were formed and because of which new relationships are possible. Indeed, if the Black Atlantic is anything it is a museum of the history of erasure and of creative possibility against all odds. Thus, in addition to being a heuristic, the Black Atlantic is also a *method*, a practice. One can *do* the Black Atlantic—if one wishes. As Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley argued: “the black [sic] Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic.”²⁷⁹ For Tinsley, “queer” works at two registers. Firstly, it is a means of re-thinking intellectual history, even Gilroy’s history. Throughout *The Black Atlantic*, Tinsley argues, Gilroy’s focus is on the supposed great men of history: Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Robert Wedderburn, and Crispus Attucks. Tinsley asks, in a parenthetical aside, “why omit Harriet Jacobs, Mary Seacole, and other sailing women?”²⁸⁰ Implicitly, “queer” is about the underside of history—that which allocated to the dumping ground of history. At the same time, Tinsley uses queer as a practice of survival. Thus, queer is not limited to same-gender relationships but is instead a way of finding life (pleasure) in the midst of life-threatening oppression. Tinsley writes: “*Queer* in the sense of marking a disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans’ living deaths.”²⁸¹ To think about the Black Atlantic as queer is to think about the multiple ways in which enslaved Africans and their descendants have created ways where there seemed to be no way. More than

²⁷⁹ Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queering Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (2008): 191.

²⁸⁰ Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” 195.

²⁸¹ Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” 195; emphasis original.

this though, it was a method of creating ways even when those ways were impossible. Meaning, methods of otherwise are not always obtainable but they are still worked toward—mad methods of becoming, trying to do the impossible.

Building off Tinsley, Christina Sharpe offered: “We might add that the Black and queer Atlantic have always been the Trans*Atlantic.”²⁸² Sharpe extended the queerness of the Atlantic to think about movement without destination. She wrote: “What I am therefore calling the Trans*Atlantic is that s/place, condition, or process that appears alongside the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents.”²⁸³ Here she pointed to her use of the asterisk as a variable, like in mathematics. A designation that can hold an infinite number of possibilities. She continues: “The asterisk after a word functions as the wildcard...the asterisk after the prefix ‘trans’ holds the place open for thinking.”²⁸⁴ Her use of “trans*” is connected to the wedding of transgender studies and the internet. In transgender studies, the asterisk proved to be a powerful tool for thinking about linguistic problems and possibilities. Originally used by online transgender communities for bypassing the limits of search engines, the asterisk has stuck around as a way of denoting something and simultaneously pointing beyond what is denoted. Sevan Bussell demonstrates that as early as 2010 internet transgender communities were using “trans*” to manipulate search engine outcomes. Bussell writes: “When you add an asterisk to the end of a search term, you’re telling your computer to search for whatever you typed, plus any characters after.”²⁸⁵ Searching for “trans*,” for example, would return results for transgender, transmen,

²⁸² Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 30.

²⁸³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 30.

²⁸⁴ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 30.

²⁸⁵ Sevan Bussell, “Why We Use the Asterisk.” *Candiussell Corner*, October 2, 2012, <https://candiussellcorner.blogspot.com/2012/10/why-we-use-asterisk-sevan.html>.

transnational, transatlantic, and so on. As Bussell notes, then, the asterisk is digital variable that has made its way out from the internet and into use by the general public. This use, that Sharpe and Bussell point us to, is not unlike its uses in trans and queer communities in Latin America who use the asterisk in place of a terminal vowel for gendered words. “Locas,” for example, with the gendered “a,” might become “loc*s” in an effort to circumvent the gendered nature of the Spanish language.²⁸⁶ Sharpe’s “Trans*Atlantic,” then, speaks to possibility, excessive possibility. Mad possibilities.

In recent years, the asterisk has shifted to become a difference of style than of linguistic or technological necessity. Specifically, it now serves to differentiate between trans and trans*, with the former indicating a kind of teleological destination and the latter a more open-endedness. That is to say, for some, “trans” (without asterisk) is limiting in its possibilities for gender expression. Namely, this is because without the asterisk, it often refers to some prescribed gendered destination. In these instances, the assumption is that “trans woman” would conform to a certain set of anatomical or cosmetic standards. On the other hand, “trans*” asterisk allows for a more becoming. One need not solidly align with any anatomical standards in order to be trans*.

According to Avery Tompkins part of what was happening during the 1990s was that “transgender” had come to be the catch-all term for gender variance.²⁸⁷ But many found this term unyielding in that it reinforced certain aspects of gender binaries that one’s particular gender could not or did not conform to. Oftentimes this had to do with physically conforming to a gender identity by going through top surgery, for example. In response to how “trans” (without

²⁸⁶ See Sayak Valencia, “Del queer al cuir: Ostranénie geopolítica y epistémica desde el sur glocal,” in *Queer & cuir: Políticas de lo irreal*, eds. Fernando R. Lanuza and Raúl M. Carrasco, 19–37 (Coyoacán: Fontamara, 2015).

²⁸⁷ Avery Tompkins, “Asterisk,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 27.

asterisk) reinforces gender stereotypes and binaries, theorists looked to the use of the asterisk as a way of circumventing gender binaries offline. “Trans*” gave space to gender non-conforming people to express themselves outside of the gender binary. “Trans*,” like playfulness, is movement and variation without goal. Tompkins continued: “Trans* is thus meant to include not only identities such as transgender, transsexual, trans man, and trans woman that are prefixed by trans- but also identities such as genderqueer, neutriox, intersex, agender, two-spirit, cross-dresser, and genderfluid.”²⁸⁸ Jack Halberstam wrote something similar about the use of the asterisk, saying:

I have selected the term “trans*” for this book [*Trans** (2018)] precisely to open up the term to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. As we will see, the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, or a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorization.²⁸⁹

To be trans*, then, is a way of becoming in the world that does not conform to specifics of gender presentation and performance. Trans* is seeking otherwise. It is open ended and full of possibilities. Halberstam’s definition of trans*, though, helpfully recasts it in relation to gender and to think about how one’s gender is up to the individual. It is up to the mad. The mad will decide their fate and even then, they might not themselves know their plans or, if they have any, they might not have any intentions other than pleasure (Chapter Three).

The desire to move beyond binary notions of gender and to include gender variation on a wider scale drives the motivation to include the asterisk. Thus, in the shift away from

²⁸⁸ Tompkins, “Asterisk,” 27.

²⁸⁹ Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 4.

“transatlantic” to “trans* Atlantic,” the focus is not only on the physical movement that happens across the waters but also to the open-endedness of what lies ahead. Sharpe wrote:

The asterisk speaks to a range of configurations of Black being that take the form of translation, transatlantic, transgression, transgender, transformation, transmogrification, transcontinental, transfixed, trans-Mediterranean, transubstantiation (by which process we might understand the making of bodies into flesh and then fungible commodities while retaining the appearance of flesh and blood), transmigration, and more.²⁹⁰

She plays with language and prefix to think about how blackness is and exceeds all of these that she lists. The “Trans*Atlantic” is a way of thinking about the Black Atlantic queerly and excessively—madly.

Whereas in Chapter Three, locas celebrated and reveled in joy without purpose, in the Mad Atlantic, locas move. Move without knowing where they will end up, what port they will disembark in, what form they will (or could) take. The Ship of Fools that Bruce points us to at the beginning of this section is full of locas who perform, deviate from, and upend gender expressions without destination. That is, some locas, like Willian, have no intention of undergoing any kind of medical surgery to augment his gender. La loca is how Willian already does this. Their trans*ness is not confirmed by Law or Nature. It does not align. Locas express a gender that does not necessitate or require something beyond them (something “real”) for validity. A loca is in the moment, becoming from event to event.

As such, Sharpe’s use of “Trans*Atlantic” might be modified to make it more accommodating to such a theorization of “trans*.” It is important to note that Sharpe’s theorization does not preclude the above theorization of “trans*,” lowercase “t.” Instead, in marking a distance and difference between “trans*” and “Atlantic” I point to the rupture caused by the Middle Passage, and move movement of people who were designated fools to be confined

²⁹⁰ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 30.

in ships, as Bruce imagined. Separating “trans*” from “Atlantic” to read as “trans* Atlantic” points away from stability and toward possibility. Attempts to calculate and qualify trans* are met with escape and evasion. The trans* Atlantic, note: lowercase, also attempts to move away from the designation of trans*ness “proper noun, away from stability of personhood, from knowability to movement and flight.”²⁹¹ Thus, it eschews “the fiction of corporeal wholeness and intelligible signification rather than interpreting bodies as intensive maps open to limitless recharting.”²⁹²

The Black Atlantic has always been the trans* Atlantic. It has always been a site of excess. Like the waters upon which ships moved human cargo or in which that same human cargo was dumped, to be trans* is to be excess and mad. To be trans* is to announce and to embody new possibilities of becoming. Locas, like Alexa and Willian, carve out space where and when they can find it. Stryker, “the dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell,” carved out here space at the APA meeting.²⁹³ Alexa carved out her space on the streets of Toa Baja. For Alexa, in particular, the Mad Atlantic helps to frame her as one line of potentiality that moves outward from the abyss.

Conclusion: Trans*ing Madness

This chapter has charted a mobile relationship. By centering Alexa and reading her into trans* theory, I uncover the relationship between la fiesta’s loca and the “general” loca of Puerto

²⁹¹ Alejandro Escalante, “Trans* Atlantic Religion: Spirit Possession and Gender Ideology in Cuban Santería,” *TQS: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (2019): 396.

²⁹² Jami Weinstein, “Transgenres and the Plane of Gender Imperceptibility,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 156.

²⁹³ Stryker, “My Words,” 239.

Rico. Ultimately, *la loca* and *locura* reveal themselves to be forms of transgression that announces a myriad of possibilities that were either previously foreclosed or unthought of. Important to note here, then, is that in calling *la loca* trans, or, indeed, trans*, I am not attempting to say something about the “real” gender of Willian or *la loca*. Instead, I am attempting to draw a connection between how trans* is movement without destination or origination and does not foreclose possibility. Trans in this sense is a constellation that names something but holds it loosely and is willing to let go of it at a moment’s notice.

At the outset of this chapter, I overlay the life and murder of Alexa Negrón Luciano on trans theorist Susan Stryker’s protest at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. Stryker interrupted a meeting that had deemed her and other trans people as *locas*. Stryker was at the APA meeting to cause a commotion and disruption—not unlike *la loca* during *la fiesta*. In Alexa’s case, her life was a protest. “I am feminine enough,” she told the world. Perhaps not with any kind of political aim but like the *locas* in Chapter Three, she was seeking otherwise and as such her life brushed up against the societal standards and norms. Her murder, though, is not simply an attempt to suppress but is also an attempt to reveal “the truth.” Her murders desired to reveal her Nature and make her subject to the Subject. *Locas* like Stryker and Alexa announce new possibilities through their lives. There is not something more (something more true or deeper) to their lives. “In reality,” all we have is performance. What is performed is the “really real.” *Locura*, then, is a method for exploring the possibilities and the yet un-thought becomings we might embody or take on. It is a method by which we might become multiple or ineffable. It is also a method by which we might strive after otherwise when what is offered is not enough.

In the last section of this chapter, I layout the theoretical groundwork for the Mad Atlantic, a way to understand the Atlantic and its connectivity as superfluous and affirmative. I began by sketching out the Black Atlantic's network-like relationship between externalities that are becoming the other through their shared histories. From there, I turn to consider the various modifications and augmentations of the Black Atlantic via Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley and Christina Sharpe. Through these changes, I chart how the Black Atlantic shifts from a theory of mixture to a method of survival and escape, with special attention to the gendered nature of survival and escape. If, as Tinsley argues, that Black Atlantic has always been the Queer Atlantic, I take this one step further: the Black Atlantic has always been the "trans* Atlantic," that place of movement without origin and without destination, the place of possibility and potential, the place of unknown depth and wonder. That is to say, the Atlantic is an "aqueous territory," a fluid and ever-changing space that is not unlike *la loca*.²⁹⁴ While it might be captured in one instance, it defies these captures and continues to escape. Likewise, the *locas*, the mad-trans* people, might be temporarily captured or contained but they will eventually evade and escape.

Tracking *locura* through Alexa and her murder, I make the connection between the monstrous, which is understood as being supposedly not human. Indeed, it might even be possible here that trans is indeed not being human inasmuch as this mode of being in the world is seen as anti-human à la Stryker. Being trans* is being demonic. Or, better, becoming-demonic. It is unrecognizable via Nature or the Subject. This mode of becoming in the world, though, is not without its own problems. Indeed, organizations like the APA cannot abide superfluous ways of being. Modes need to be categorized and conceptualized within a given set of parameters. These

²⁹⁴ Ernesto Bassi, *Aqueous Territories: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

parameters come in multiple forms, can look like Nature or God. Locas push past these limits and find way opportunities.

CONCLUSION

I hate travelling and explorers. Yet here I am proposing to tell the story of my expeditions.
—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*²⁹⁵

No Conclusion

Therí Alyce Pickens writes in *Mad Blackness :: Black Madness* that her text purposefully does not have a conclusion. She writes: “reading and theorizing mad Blackness and Black madness demands an elliptical openness that refuses linearity and progression toward traditional conclusions. Rather than artificially foist one upon this discussion, I’ve chosen to leave it somewhat open. This is a mad Black book, after all.”²⁹⁶ Pickens wants the chapters contained within her text to be the beginning of something as opposed to the final word. Drawing from Pickens’s work, in theorizing the mad blackness and Black madness of *la loca*, I want to think about her as an open-ended set of possibilities (Chapter Three) rather than a neatly packaged manuscript. For Pickens, this meant that she calls her chapters “conversations” instead of “chapters.” Like a conversation, they wander about a theme. Spoken conversations, as I have shown (Chapter One) outlast their original intent, if one is known. Something reminds the speaker of something and the conversation follows that spark. Sometimes sparks fade and trains of thought are missed, and the conversation partners sit on the platform, looking down the tracks, wondering if there is another train coming. *La loca* is like these conversations. She does not have a “real purpose”; instead, she wanders around *la fiesta*, disrupting and provoking. I would be

²⁹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 17.

²⁹⁶ Pickens, *Mad Blackness*, 20.

remiss to try and wrap up neatly a dissertation that examined her. Instead, I offer here some closing thoughts on *la loca*. In this conclusion, if I have to call it that, I want to extend Pickens's idea of conversation and wandering. Like *la loca*, who wanders calle 187 looking to provoke Loiceños, this dissertation is meant to provoke. It does not seek to be the final, definitive answer to a question but rather the beginning of a set of several interrelated conversations. Similarly, what I have strived for in preceding chapters has been the beginning of multiple conversations about what is possible, as Pickens argues.

Locas Everywhere

Once during my time in Puerto Rico, my aunt Mónica and her husband Manuel took me to Viejo San Juan to shop. We spent the day looking for some souvenirs among the Spanish colonial-style buildings and cobblestone streets. I was not looking for anything in particular but my family insisted I bring something back for my partner. In fact, at the time, the ordeal felt more annoying than helpful. However, in hindsight, I realize they wanted to be helpful and show off Puerto Rico to my partner—even if it meant a tacky coffee mug with a coquí on it. Cheap bits of “Made in China” fill shops in Viejo San Juan. T-shirts with half-naked women on beaches, plates and mugs decorated with Puerto Ricans flags, frogs, or palm trees are easy to find. So are shot glasses with the same imagery next to bottles of Don Q, a brand of Puerto Rican rum. These shops all “sell” Puerto Rico as a paradise island. And all of these products are designed to find their way from Puerto Rico to other places, ostensibly to attract people in those other places to come to Puerto Rico for the women, beaches, and drinks.

Among the other tat are bags of Puerto Rican coffee. Brands like Café Lareño, Alto Grande, Café Rico, and El Coquí line the walls in these tourist shops. Their bright green, blue,

red, and black bags remind me of the colorful vestments of el vejigante and Loíza. Puerto Rico, like many of its Caribbean neighbors, has a long history of coffee cultivation. Famous among them is Café Yaucono. It's bright black and yellow label stands out. Across the top of the bag of coffee is resealable sticker that reads "*el gustito que despierta a Puerto Rico,*" or, "the taste that wakes up Puerto Rico." On the resealable sticker is a woman with large hoop earrings, big red lips, a handkerchief over her head. She reminds me of la loca. Among all the objects that are waiting for export to the far corners of the earth, is la loca. Or, at least, someone who looks like her, like Mamá Inés, Yaucono's icon. Or, does la loca look like her? La loca's and Mamá Inés's likeness is uncanny. A socially imagined and constructed idea of the Black Puerto Rican woman. A small difference, though: this time, la loca is serving coffee instead of cleaning porches and making jokes. Still imagined as someone in a position of service, though. I pick up a couple of bags, multiplying la loca, creating new points of departure and new ports of entry.

What does this imagery do? I wondered to myself. There is something to be said about the preoccupation with seeing Black women in service rolls. Something about how Black women are imagined in general. La loca does not deny this. She is sweeping and asking to be paid for her work. She is providing a service. She does not pretend that those expectations, those interpellations, do not exist. However, she does not address them directly. She sidesteps their concerns. She does not feel the need to respond directly to the hails of others. She mocks, she plays, she overflows her roles through her parodic redundancy of gendered and racialized roles as the Black-black woman who cleans.

COVID-19 and Fieldwork

In the wake of the storage facility scandal, the earthquakes of December 2019–January 2020, and new political controversies concerning the appointment of interim governor Wanda Vázquez Garced, the people of Puerto Rico thought it was only fitting that they should have another go at another New Year celebration. On January 31, 2020, Puerto Rico said “goodbye” to January. This was an opportunity to start the new year again and bid “*pa’l carajo*” to 2019 and January 2020. As fireworks went off all around Puerto Rico, a novel airborne virus had already claimed the lives of an estimated 265 people. Little did we know that events like this one, a celebratory gathering in Viejo San Juan, would likely be the last one for over a year. Since then, over two thousand people have died in Puerto Rico. Globally, over two million people have died as a result of COVID-19. In the weeks following the discovery and announcement of the novel coronavirus, it was clear an unprecedented pandemic was at hand. It was unclear, however, how this would change everything, for everyone.

For me, the ongoing pandemic meant that I would likely not return to Loíza to continue my fieldwork for the foreseeable future. Though it was “possible” to return, the ethical imperative outweighed any formal ability. As a colony of the United States, Puerto Rico is subject to US law and, as such, they could not close their airports to travel coming from the US. However, the prospect of infecting others or myself to finish this phase of my research was not ethically possible. I put an end to my formal fieldwork and instead turned my attention to other forms of interview and data collection, namely, digital ethnography. However, these methods, when forced as a last-minute decision (instead of built into the research plan), make conversations sterile, overly formal.²⁹⁷ As time went on, messages back and forth over

²⁹⁷ The “virtual fix,” as Ryan Cecil Jobson notes, does not solve anything absolutely; indeed, it can actually reproduce the problems of the “analog” under a different name. That is, the supposed democracy of the digital

WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger became shorter and shorter, and slower and slower.

Eventually, I gave up on trying to fill in the gap; it was forced. This means that my research, as all initial research, is partial. While my familiarity with Puerto Rico, its history, language, and culture were helpful entry points, they could not facilitate long-term relationships over two weeks, the length of my pre-dissertation fieldwork. Relationships take time. They require honesty and vulnerability that only time and presence can allow. As the various vaccines begin their rollout in Puerto Rico, a return seems hopeful, though. This means that a return to my ethnographic work will hopefully be ethically possible in the future.

In Loíza, COVID-19 meant that for the first time ever, “la fiesta” was broadcast on TV. “La fiesta” because the program could not replace the experience of sitting along or processing down calle 187. Indeed, the program was not “la fiesta” specifically but was instead a program about la fiesta. It was a documentary-style television program that examined music and visual arts in Loíza and their relationship to la fiesta. Scenes included music from the Ayalas ballet and some of the artwork of Samuel Lind. *Mantenadoras*, like Rosa Julia, were also part of the program and were interviewed about how they came to keep the images of Santiago. City and church officials asked people *not* to come to Loíza. Given the uncertainty at the time, they felt it more appropriate that people celebrate at home, should they celebrate at all. The television program was not meant to suffice for the experience of walking down calle 187 with the images of Santiago or of drinking and eating with friends and family. Instead, the program helped to mark the occasion in the face of overwhelming precarity.

methods elides the way that certain people have access to high-speed internet, laptop computers, or a smartphone. See Ryan Cecil Jobson, “The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019.” *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 2 (2020): 261ff. Moreover, the “virtual fix” brings with it its own problems, principally, the production of e-waste and the speed with which technology becomes outdated. See Fernando Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 304.

In the grand scheme of things, my fieldwork being interrupted or a televised version of la fiesta going ahead instead of the full pageantry matter little. With millions dead and still more who will die from this virus, what matters more is that the ones we love have healthy lives. So, while I mark these two moments as ways that COVID-19 changed or affected my research, it is more as a way of signaling that there is more to be done. However, that more to be done should be complemented by the fact that what I am after here is mobile and fleeting, as I say in the Introduction. La loca is not permanent, she is not testable, she is not reducible. Instead, what I have done here is to theorize la loca as a framework for understanding potentials.

Possible, Otherwise

In seeking what is possible, I make it explicit that what is present is insufficient. Both in terms of what is available to use (language, for example) and the conditions one is forced to work in or under (recognition). That is, the current state of affairs in the world is not enough. Like las locas in front of La Catedral, la loca is a figure who seeks otherwise—in spite of what is going on around her. Through the use of theorists like Saidiya Hartman, I theorized how la loca refuses the current state of things and seeks other possibilities. These other possibilities, though, do not neatly align with what people think is proper behavior or civility. Indeed, the possibilities that la loca seeks and inhabits are anarchistic. Moreover, the otherwise and the possible that they seek out and live are not revolutionary politics; instead, they are forms of self-making through play and pleasure in a world that would rather see them erased.

In theorizing what is possible, I have gathered together and drawn from a set of poet-philosophers and theorists to think about possibility and the potentials of possibility. Specifically, drawing from Glissant, I have thought to theorize la loca within the Caribbean. Glissant argued

that diasporization of Africans via the transatlantic slave trade inaugurated a series of potentials where captive people could extend beyond themselves. This is what Glissant calls the “consent not to be a single being.”²⁹⁸ La loca is this consent (read: relation) to go beyond oneself and enact a series of possibilities unique to the Caribbean because of the diasporization. La loca is, as I have shown, a mode of being that exceeds the boundaries set up to contain. As such, I have connected this Glissantian thread with Sylvia Wynter’s theorization of Black womanhood as an impossibility in the face of the tools given, which are insufficient inasmuch as they seek to recast the Black woman in relation to her colonial counterparts. A different language is needed. That language, I argue is nonsensical and illogical—mad, like la loca.

To think about la loca in this way is meant to complement the already existing literature on la fiesta and la loca. In the most obvious sense, it is meant to analyze la fiesta through this eccentric character. By attending to the ways that la fiesta itself is not static, I read la loca as not simply a character within la fiesta but as a method for understanding the multiple and contradictory histories that make up la fiesta. Through the multiple lives of Santiago, I argued for a multiple and excessive history that resists easy codification. Mónica told me the several versions of the story of Santiago’s miraculous appearing. On more than one occasion, she told me that “no one knows the truth.” The miraculous appearing and disappearing saint is not the kind of history that gets verified by a historian and printed in a scholarly text by an academic press. This history is cultivated by the people who tell it. I use cultivation purposefully to attend to the ways that history changes and grows over time. I argued this is a mad history; it is multiple and excessive. The complement to existing literature, then, is to think about la fiesta beyond a “recovery” of Africanity. Specifically, it is about how Loiceños narrate their own Africanity in

²⁹⁸ Glissant et al., “Édouard Glissant,” 5.

and against generally accepted forms of it. This means that la fiesta is not a Caribbean manifestation of a more original, more pure form of African practice and religiosity. La fiesta is its own form of Africanness. The history that is traced throughout this dissertation complements the attempts to find the historical and original Africa in Loíza with the multiple forms “history” takes.

These excessive histories reveal something about how things get formed and reformed over time. That is, there is no original—no real. Without the real, what we are left with is what is revealed. La loca turns our attention to the seams and sutures of our own skin and forces us to see our own constructedness. That which we thought was natural or Nature is really constructed and forced together through a series of relations. There is no origin, there is only movement, only the abyss, the entanglement of externalities turned internalities. As one aspect of this entanglement, la loca provides a method for rethinking the Caribbean. It is not simply a pre-given but instead a construction. To think otherwise within this construction is to think about the movement of the waters that make the Caribbean world possible. The Black Atlantic becomes the Mad Atlantic: a way to think about the ever-shifting world that evades and escapes capture.

What I have attempted to do is go beyond those theories and think about what she does instead of what she is. To that end, I have not so much tried to circumscribe her as much as implicate her with thing-like history, race, politics, ethics, and ethnography. Moreover, I investigated “mad,” at multiple registers. Specifically, I think about “mad” in the sense of excessive, multiple, inane, unruly, and monstrous. History as excessive and multiple. The figure of the Black woman as inane. Play and pleasure-seeking as wild behavior. And finally, madness as the proclamation that there is no “real.”

La loca is more than an object of research in this dissertation. She goes beyond what the page can contain about her. As such, I have attempted to stay with her, to stay with madness, and her madness, but she will not be contained. No, she is elsewhere. Perhaps she is narrating a story that has multiple endings—no ending! Perhaps, she is in a bathroom in Toa Baja. Or, perhaps she is dancing by herself at a club because she does not need anyone else to dance with. Maybe she is protesting government corruption and incompetence. No, la loca is not here. She is gone. But she is not missing. Here, in the wake of her passing, we see her effects: excessiveness, incomprehensiveness, incivility, and performativity. Yet she defies even these. This dissertation attempted to stay with her madness.

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