Black Latinx Dexterity:
Emotions in Bomba Puertorriqueña and Decolonizing Diasporic Archives

By

Sarah E. Bruno

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Anthropology)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2021

Date of final oral examination: 5/7/2021

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Jerome Camal, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Anthropology
Falina Enriquez, Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Anthropology
Amy Stambach, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Anthropology
Almita Miranda, Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Geography
Maria Lepowsky, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Anthropology
Aisha Beliso de Jesús, Professor, Princeton University, American Studies

Abstract

This project examines Afro-Puerto Rican women's usage of bomba, the oldest Afro-Puerto Rican genre, to heal themselves and their communities in the wake of colonialism's constant catastrophes. "Black Latinx Dexterity" joins Black feminist historians in compiling an affective archive. These dancers aided in ousting Puerto Rico's governor during the summer of 2019 and thus extend and require a reconsideration of a Afro-Caribbean feminist praxis based on care, self-reliance, and aesthetics. Do women practitioners of bomba embody particular affective states and deploy emotional dexterity in daily life against postcolonial stressors? How do these bomberas use dance to recover their lost past and heal from the ongoing trauma of disaster? Can feelings have a history? After 16 months of field research in Puerto Rico and Chicago, I use bomba as a site and method in compiling an analytic of affective archives to examine bomberas' continuous affective states throughout history and ethnographically uncover what I call, Afro-Puerto Rican women's emotional dexterity. Emotional dexterity describes bomberas ability to negotiate their sensuous postures as they navigate (post)coloniality inside bomba and outside of dance spaces. This project, which lies at the nexus of archival research and ethnographic methods, performance analysis, and dancing is scaffolded by and contributes to discourses occurring in Anthropology, Latinx studies, Black studies, history, affect studies, and performance studies. I am attentive to the ways music and dance are rich sites for digital humanist and ethnographic-based analyses regarding blackness, colonialism, diaspora, and affect. I reconsider the aesthetics of revolution and return to expressive cultures as a site and method to contribute to current discourses surrounding decolonization and abolition.

Acknowledgements

I am here because of the people who saw who I was and who I would be. This work is indebted to the bomberas who let me into their homes, shared their life stories with me, corrected my Spanish, and trusted me to know the truth and write what people deserve to know. Specifically, I want to thank Marién and Tata and Cary for their kindness while I was in Puerto Rico. My knees will forever bend in your honor when I enter a batey. I want to thank Ivelisse and Melanie, my Chi Rican big sisters and mentors, you both have offered me a covering of protection while I did this work that means more than these pages can ever hold. People spoke to me off the strength of your word and I will never take that lightly.

I want to thank my committee for their time and investment in me. Dr. Stambach, your edits and encouragement have always been appreciative. Dr. Enriquez, you have always been kind and made time to not only teach me about anthropology or writing but also about how to be a graduate student and that is something the world needs more of. Dr. Lepowsky, I am not exaggerating when I say your courses dramatically changed my life and propelled me to where I am today. I will think of our weekly meetings going over methods in the field fondly and remember that your generosity is a large reason of why I am writing this today. Dr. Miranda, I thank you for your care and advice since the moment you met me. You, amongst others listed on this page, have demonstrated a model of mentorship that I aspire to mirror to future Latinas from Chicago. Dr. Beliso De Jesús, I thank you for investing your time and labor into my ideas and project. The countless letters and integral advice you have so graciously given me truly made the past 6 years' worth it. Dr. Camal, I thank you for taking on a high risk and high reward student. I thank you for learning me as a scholar and person. I thank you for being the advisor that a higher power picked out specifically for me.

I want to thank others in the academy who have been how I endured. To my Transforming Anthropology Social Media Team: Dr. Diaz, Tiffany Peacock, Savannah Kosteniuk and Chelsey Carter; thank you for letting me be the aesthetic creative chaotic person I needed to be to get this dissertation finished. Dr Parsard, Dr. Jobson, and Dr. Shange I thank you for your counsel and being co-conspirators. Breanna Escamilla, Uriel Serrano, Brian Cabral, Ellen Hebden, Matt Venker, Caitlin Benadetto, Ampson Hagan, Delande Justinvil, Leniqueca Welcome, Brendane Tynes, Tina Lassi, Yesmar Oyarzum, Daisy Guzman, Maya Kearney, Zalika Ibaorimi, Melinda Gonzalez, Claritza Maldonado, and Andrea Constant; thank you for the zoom sessions and for always validating my feelings. Thank you for laughing with me, the memes, and for always asking how you could support me. I thank you for being colleagues who have become friends. and reminding me this day would eventually come.

I want to thank my mentors. Dr. Rosa, Dr. Figueroa-Vásquez, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Bonilla. Thank you for seeing me. Thank you for covering me. Thank you for demanding my very best and always offering grace when my best is out of reach at the moment. Thank you for cherishing my Chicago hood tendencies, laughing with me about them, and continuously creating space for me and so many others like me to exist in the academy. I know without a doubt I could not be where I am and where I am headed without you. Thank you for being my very own Puerto Rican (scholars) avengers squad.

I am here because of those who lent me their backs when mines couldn't take it anymore. Elton Ferdinand, Natasha Crooks, Marquise Mays, Brian Allen, De'Angelo Hale, and Kelsey Wilkerson thank you for helping me to survive my time in a place that was not home. Brea, Chelsey, Samantha Adams, Ally Adams, Zaira Hernandez, Asha Omar, Lola Lawal, Brianna Blue, Barbara Gonzalez, Jillian Stacey, Cartecia Lawerence and Sofia Snow; Toni Morrison said

it best, “She is a friend of mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.” I thank you for your sisterhood. I thank you for opening your homes to me, bending your ears to listen. I want to especially thank the friends who have been there for me since high school and accepted and loved every new version of me; Olivia Jones, Celina Hernandez, Guisela Hernandez, Raych Jackson, Debrielle De La Haye, Billy Lowry, Evan Lowry, Lester Harris, and Monica Meza. Y’all know what it is because it's always been that.

I am here because of those who crafted me with tears and praying hands. I have a large family but there are specific people I am going to make space for. Bendición Tio Henry, thank you for always reminding me to keep my head up and always telling me there will be bumps in the road but to keep going. Ayanna, lil road dawg you deserve the world and I hope you see you can do whatever you want. Jade, thank you for 6 am phone calls and driving to Madison when I couldn’t take it anymore. Bendición Grandma and Grandpa, thank you for praying for me every night and thank you for helping me when I lived in Puerto Rico. Bendición Titi, thank you for being my friend and prayer warrior. Thank you for cancelling my doubting thoughts and teaching me generosity. Thank you to my sister-in-law Marva for your friendship, always taking sister shots with me, and taking the time to understand me.

A large part of my family became ancestors during my college career. Titi Margarita and Tio Papo, thank you for knowing I was meant to love music and see the world with a keen eye. Tio Felix Bruno, thank you for teaching me to navigate Puerto Rico and for reminding me that I am formidable. To Angel Bruno Sr., Dad, thank you for strengthening me, protecting me, and giving me a keen hesitation towards authority. ¡PRESENTE!

To my brother Angel Bruno, Jr. I am better than you at dominos and now it's written in a publication. Thank you for always being my big brother and for reminding me that I don't even let you talk to me any kind of way. Thank you for telling me to make this journey personal, because you're right. This is so personal. To my mom, my Maria, thank you for always trying to understand what is going on even if I barely understand it. Thank you for cleaning and cooking for me during exams. Thank you for praying every morning for me. Thank you for having your fingerprints all over me even if we aren't alike.

Glossary

Barrile/s: Barrel drum in bomba. These were historically made out of emptied rum barrels.

Batey: the dance circle formed in bomba

Bombazo: bomba gathering where bomba will be played and danced

Bomberx/a: practitioner of bomba

Boricua: a Puerto Rican

Conciencia: consciousness

Criada: Domestic worker that is historically relegated to Black women and also were paid very little wages and could be passed down within families. Akin to slavery

Criollo: a Creole, a person or cultural object born in Puerto Rico or *of* Puerto Rico

Cuembé: a rhythm in bomba that is flirty and has various variations in different geographical areas in Puerto Rico

Destierro: an untranslateable uprootedness that inscribes loss and grief in an individual's body. In my dissertation I use Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez' theorization of destierro.

Finca: land or yard

Figura: Figure, or as I theorize in this dissertation, a woman elder in bomba.

Mayor/es: In the terms of this dissertation mayor/es means elder/s.

Mestizaje: Racial mixedness

Paseo: promenade

Plena: Puerto Rican folkloric genre of music played with a pandereta and güiro.

Primo: principal drummer during a bombazo in the batey.

Resistencia: Within the terms of this dissertation, resistencia means endurance.

Sicá: a bomba rhythm that is used to tell anecdotal stories.

Subidor: a synonym or other word for primo or the principal drummer in bombazos

Taller: workshop or collective space/group

List of Figures

Table of Contents

Introduction

A La Linea No Voy Mama:

Walking Differently into the Past and Present

"When you dance *bomba*, you walk different" -*Indigo Waters, 2019*

I saw Indigo first dance at a *bombazo* (*bomba* dance gathering) during the kick-off of the National Bomba Research Conference in 2019. A family member's dance school in San Francisco had travelled to Puerto Rico to participate in the research conference and to attend workshops throughout the island. Indigo was one of these students from San Francisco. Women held hand fans to bring some type of relief in the sticky humidity. The drummers were positioned in the *marquesina* (outdoor patio) of the house. However, as they began to sing and dance on the side patio it became clear that there would not be enough room for all of the people there to participate in the bombazo, Soon the narrow street was blocked off by the crowd. Some brought lawn chairs from their trunks, others sat on car hoods. There were children and there were elders, some with canes and others given the seating that was already brought out. We were offered cold water and *escabeche* from one of the most renowned bomba families. They were a dynasty, according to some. The *bombazo* was being held at their family home in Santurce, a city best known for its prominent role in Black Puerto Rican history, and I would later learn that they typically held their bombazos in a plaza in San Juan. The location of this bombazo is what cements this experience as even more precious. I, along with countless others, was welcomed into their home. It could have easily been a museum with all of the framed newspaper clippings hanging on the wall. I wanted to take my time moving from each to the next, but I also didn't want to miss the bombazo.

The drums were set up and there were close to 100 people in attendance. Many were in town for the Bomba Research Conference. Indigo entered the *batey* (dance circle), then moved around the space (*paseando*), marking it as hers, to demonstrate her knowledge and mastery of bomba. She was dancing to a *cuembé*, her hips and skirt moving up and around as she did her *paseo*, right up to the important moment when she locked eyes with the *primo* (the *subidor* or lead percussionist), signaling their conversation could begin. The rest of the *buleadores* (subordinate drummers) played their *barriles* (the main drum played in bomba) and the audience watched, transfixed, as she moved.[1] Indigo threw her skirt, hips, and arms at different tempos in order to make overlapping rhythms and the primo would follow her movement and speed, the sound of them rifting over the bass beats maintained by the rest of the barriles. Indigo danced, her posture upright and strong, and she took the primo and the spectators on a journey with her as she controlled the song with her improvised *piquetes* – the specific movements a *bomberx* uses to elicit a response from the primo. As she ended her time in the batey and exited the circle, everyone clapped, and soon, the next dancer began their paseando.

After the bombazo, Indigo and I went to a nearby cluster of bars. It was at a very popular strip in Santurce, called *La Placita*. We first made our rounds around the businesses to see which would be most worthwhile. Some places were clearly more popular than others. As we walked around, men called to get our attention, some in English and others in Spanish, but one man approached us. It was clear he was from the States. As he walked towards us, me and Indigo whispered excitedly trying to figure out which one of us he was going to approach. I was right: he began directing his attention to Indigo. They talked and we walked with him to the bar that his

[1] *Cuembé* is one of the main basic rhythms of *bomba.* It can also be referred to as a güembe, depending on region, tempo, and song lyrics. It is important to note that Indigo is dancing a *cuembé* because it is one of the only rhythms where the *paso básico* (basic step during promenading) incorporated hip movements.

friends were going to. He was Black, from the East Coast, and there on vacation. While we waited to enter the bar, someone pushed his friends and an altercation happened. It was a tangle of bodies until the bouncer maced everyone in the area. Maybe because Indigo and I are from large cities, or maybe because we both had had interactions with law enforcement, we knew to step back and avoid the mace. We also knew the police would be coming soon. As the police arrived, Indigo and I were helping wipe our new friends' eyes and guiding him away from that business so that he could avoid further violence and interaction with law enforcement. I remember my heart thumping and my whole body feeling sticky leading a grown man away from the police, but me and Indigo held a fear of what could or might happen to him if we were not able to help him leave that situation. Was a stranger worth it? I don't even know if I said that out loud, but at the top of my field research, the last thing I needed was to get arrested. Soon he met back up with his friends and they left back to their hotel.

The wild thing was that me and Indigo hadn't even been at the Placita for an hour. We both decided to stay a while and try at least two places. So we went to a restroom and fixed our hair and makeup and pushed that interaction to the back of our minds. Perhaps we thought we would be able to salvage the night. As we entered one place of business, salsa music blared through the speakers and everyone attempted to dance without crashing into each other. Just as Indigo and I made it to the center of the dance floor, the music changed, and the heavy bass of reggaeton was replaced with salsa congas. Indigo immediately began to *pasear*, moving around the club's dance floor as she had done at the earlier bombazo, and moved everyone out of her way so she could practice her piquetes. It was a sight to see. Even in this nightclub, with her skirt and drums gone, a stark contrast to the earlier family environment, she still moved the same way. As we were getting ready to leave, I mentioned my awestruck amusement to Indigo, that she was

able to recreate the bombazo in the club. She laughed, telling me that, "When you learn to dance bomba, you walk different." She credited her journey as a *bombera* with changing how she walks and moves through the world, not only within the batey. Her confidence as a curvy Black Puerto Rican woman was fortified through her *aprendizaje* (learning process) and was evident in her ability to claim space outside of bomba in ways similar to those she used while dancing.

We drove about an hour and a half home that night. Indigo's aunt, who she was staying with while in Puerto Rico, was only 15 minutes away from my apartment. On the ride back we talked about the police and she quizzed me on bomba rhythms. That crazy eventful night bonded us. I learned early on that great highs and incredible lows, it seems, are what could make up fieldwork.

Black Latinx Dexterity: Methodologies and Histories

My dissertation project, "Black Latinx Dexterity: Emotions in Bomba Puertorriqueña and Decolonizing Diasporic Archives," follows *bomba puertorriqueña* from the archives and the families that preserved and reinvigorated the once outlawed dance, to contemporary groups and female practitioners who perform regularly, casually, and often in Puerto Rico and in its diaspora. Bomba originated on sugar plantations, in what was then the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico, from communities of enslaved Black people. Shortly after the Haitian Revolution in the early 1800s, colonial officials outlawed bomba due to its pattern of insurgency connecting it to fugitives and rebels. In this project, I explore the following questions: (1) How does bomba point us towards a history of feeling amongst Afro-Puerto Rican women? 2) How are bomberas using bomba to confront and change their colonial realities? 3) What types of knowledge can bomba offer us, and what are the ramifications of such epistemologies?

In *Black Latinx Dexterity* I emphasize how bomba illustrates the longstanding coloniality of Puerto Rico—first under Spanish rule and now under the United States—as it continues to be a haven from antiblackness and sexism. What was once a coping mechanism to survive enslavement and to reconnect displaced subjects has evolved into a rich tradition that also speaks to contemporary social issues, like gender violence and suicide. Through ethnographic and archival research methods, I join the conceptual endeavors within Black feminism of compiling an affective archive. My concretizing of affective archives and investigations in embodiment is animated by semi-structured and life history interviews, focus groups, and my own dancing at bomba schools. *Black Latinx Dexterity* notes the ways that bomba rhythms, lyrics, and pedagogical genealogies have documented Black life in Puerto Rico that is disinterested in colonial purview and (re)inscribed by enduring sentiments of refusal amongst practitioners. Bomberas' ability to navigate their colonial predicament of constant catastrophe is marked by what I call, their emotional dexterity (Bruno 2019)[2]. Emotional dexterity is the embodied consequence of mitigating the antiblack and patriarchal violence, and the Afro-Puerto Rican genre of bomba provides the optimal scaffolding for affective archives and flushing out these essential logics of feeling amongst bomberxs and the larger Puerto Rican diaspora. *Black Latinx Dexterity* intervenes in affect theory, studies of embodiment, and discourse on diaspora by historicizing how feelings are culturally specific, how they transcend geopolitical boundaries within diasporic communities, and how they work to facilitate an intimate and infrastructural remedy to longstanding colonial violences.

[2] In my *Anthropology News* article, "Witnessing Puerto Rico, Recognition, and Feeling in the Wake of Hurricane Maria," I was early in my field research and I began thinking through emotional dexterity and the ways it characterizes diaspora. In *Black Latinx Dexterity,* I illustrate how colonialism and its consequences prompts the embodied necessity of emotional dexterity amongst Afro-Puerto Rican women.

For me and the practitioners that I have worked with, it has been evident from the start that bomba is more than music or an object, a dance, a genre, an event. As the Cepeda Family has said *Puerto Rico es Bomba*. Puerto Rico, all its beauty and tragedy, has touched bomba, and, if you looked hard enough, you would see that bomba has also touched Puerto Rico.

Methodologies

I conducted 16 months of field research (4 months of predissertation field research and 12 months of field research) in the United States and in Puerto Rico. I also conducted 4 months of archival research with the Fernando Pico Research Notes (FPRN) to join my embodied ethnographic methods with more traditional historical data to compile more robust affective archives. Furthermore, current practitioners constantly refer to their ancestors and predecessors, so this archival historical research will allow me to contextualize and compare the social and personal histories that I gather through interviews.

Daniel (2005) points out that the anthropological discipline's revered methodology of participant observation is not enough when researching dance. Instead, a researcher must be an observing participant. They must dance, instead of merely being present and observing, just as Katherine Dunham's technique was largely based on her body as a "vector of knowledge" (Chin 2014). She was participating in cultural embodiment inquiries through a diasporic praxis framework. Performance study scholar Diana Taylor (2003) also advocated participation as the best way of accessing embodied knowledge, along with Pearl Primus, who used dance to assess further understanding of behavioral patterns. In the same vein, as seen in Chapter 1, 2, and 3, I used my own dancing to understand the ways emotion is inscribed within the batey and how bomberas deploy their subsequent emotional dexterity within and outside bomba.

I also conducted over 30 interviews with bomberas and gathered life histories in the process. The list of questions that guided our interviews was as follows: what does bomba mean to you? When did you start dancing/participating in bomba? Is the history of bomba important to you? Why?, When participating in bomba which body part is most important[3]?

My ethnographic work and archival research work in tandem to compile affective archives that resonate throughout history and with contemporary practitioners who, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, continue to invest in bomba's history. Equally as important, in Chapter 4, are the interventions bomba makes within the scholarly readings of colonial records. I foreground the archival resource I was gifted for my project: the personal research notes of the late Fernando Pico, renowned Puerto Rican historian. Much of the original source material that Pico references in his notes has perished due to natural or political disaster, making these papers even more rare. There are 1,040 pages of the Pico Collection, with the last 26 for conclusions, indexes, and an abbreviation glossary. The timeframe of this data is from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, during which the geographic area would be developed from mostly plantations to what is today considered a part of the metro area of Puerto Rico. On each page of the surviving 1,040 pages, there are about 7 entries per page. One entry represents one person, listed with their race, age, literacy level, address, and perhaps family members, occupation, and testimony from police reports or entries from newspapers. For every entry, there might be up to ten other persons listed

[3] How did you learn bomba? In a workshop or school or by watching?, How do you feel when participating in bomba?, How does bomba benefit you?, What does bomba teach you? What in your life makes you feel like bomba makes you feel? If practicing bomba was no longer allowed, would you still do it? After Maria, how long did it take for you to participate or see bomba? Or the people you met through bomba? How often do you practice bomba?

who do not appear in the collection otherwise or as their own entry. Most women are listed as a sub-entry. The data, having been collected from censuses and police records, are already biased, but then again, as Saidiya Hartman (2005) points out, isn't all archival data skewed? "The archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence. This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power" (Hartman 2008, 3) That is exactly the energy I found emanating from the data set that made it so hard, so palpable to write "against its grain" (Stoler 2009).

Pico's brilliant and meticulous collection places women in a liminal space, or as what Katherine McKittrick (2006) explicates and theorizes as "the garrison." Much like the "neither region," as Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) calls it, where Black women are present but passive occupants of the social world taking place around them, the marginal has the potential to be generative due to the fact that its amorphous nature is one that exists under colonial purview, yet escapes it's pointed surveillance. The intervention of an affective archive looks beyond the data or the "mathematics of Black life" to avoid "incit[ing] a second order of violence" as Katherine McKittrick (2014) charges scholars of Black life and living to do. *Black Latinx Dexterity* takes the silent, overlooked, and oftentimes nameless in the archive and crafts a cartography of affective choreography that bomberxs today continue to recall and preserve.

Estamos en guerra: Historical Overview

Originally inhabited by the Arawak and then visited by Christopher Columbus in 1493, Puerto Rico quickly became a Spanish colony and remained as much for the next 500 or so years (Scarano 2008; González 1980). As a part of the Spanish colonial empire, Puerto Rico became a military port and one of the crown's many producers of revenue in the Caribbean. It was under

Spain that Puerto Rico became a part of what is now known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, bringing in enslaved Africans and other enslaved Black people from other parts of the Caribbean as labor for the Puerto Rican plantocracy that produced mostly sugar and tobacco (Mintz 1960; Levy 2014). Soon after the Haitian Revolution in 1804, reverberations of revolution resounded throughout the Caribbean and there were calls for the domination and enslavement of Black peoples to be atoned for and come to an end. As more and more uprisings came to unsettle the antiblack Puerto Rican society which benefitted from the labor of its enslaved Black people and people of color, emancipation soon became realized (Overman 1975; Baralt 1981; Figueroa 2005; Stark 2015). Emancipation was a slow process spanning over several years and requiring those who were enslaved to continue working for their enslavers. Equality is an even slower process, as the white supremacy that enabled colonialism also established antiblackness as an enduring ideology in Puerto Rico, which continues to structure lives of Afro-Puerto Ricans within the archipelago presently (Badillo & Cantos 1896; Kinsbruner 1996; Rivero 2005; Rodriguez-Silva 2012).

After the Spanish American War in 1898, Puerto Rico was lost to the burgeoning United States imperial regime (Kinsbruner 1973;1994). The United States quickly sought to assess and dominate its new territory, while making sure to maximize Puerto Rico's potential as an economic investment. During this time, the United States attempted to (re)make Puerto Ricans into American citizens, and at the same time continued to exoticize the archipelago as a part of the tropics (Suarez Findlay 2000; Lloréns 2014). One of the most notable historical plots amidst the U.S. and Puerto Rico was "Operation Bootstrap," characterizing the several decades long (1940s-1960s) long push towards shifting Puerto Rican society from an agrarian and sugar

plantation-based economy to that of an industrial one[4] (Scarano 1984; McCoy & Scarano 2009). By this time, President Woodrow Wilson's Jones Act of 1917 granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans, so Operation Bootstrap concentrated on the migration of Puerto Ricans to the States as a cheap labor class and the inclusion of Puerto Ricans within the military. Aggressive recruitment was put in place for Puerto Ricans to man the factories that were being built in major cities like New York and Chicago (Findlay 2014). This posture towards aerial migration is one that continues to characterize the Puerto Rican experience as they live both on the archipelago and in the States continuously travelling back and forth (Sánchez 1983).

More recently, the tenuous relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico would be tested yet again as Hurricane Maria devastated the island in September 2017[5]. Maria was a category 5 hurricane that rendered the implications of the US's pervasive relationship with Puerto Rico bare. The lag in addressing the catastrophe delayed aid, which resulted in thousands of lives lost. It ultimately was just another instance of imperial neglect. Hurricane Maria might have lasted several hours, but it was the months that followed in which Puerto Rico had minimal food, water, and no electricity that continues to ring in the minds of Puerto Ricans on the island and in its diaspora.

In the wake of Hurricane Maria, and the now commonplace discussion of Puerto Rico's debt (#PRSyllabus 2018), a widespread distrust of the local and national administration festered amongst Puerto Ricans, particularly when the Roselló administration was being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the Summer of 2019. The investigation focused on

[4] The body of scholarship that I draw on will outline the ways in which the structure of a plantation-based economy never goes away, it simply evolves. (See Thomas 2019)

[5] This is not to say that there were not other "breaking points" throughout Puerto Rico's history within the American Empire. There are several, in fact, there are too many to detail in this dissertation. For more about the constant and violent tension between the United States and Puerto Rico, see Denis (2015).

the corruption of local government officials, including the then Governor Ricardo Roselló. As incriminating text chats were released, Puerto Rican across the archipelago and the States rallied in record numbers in demonstrations resulting in the ousting of Roselló.

My interdisciplinary project enters Puerto Rico's historical trajectory during Spanish colonialism with my archival research that treats the body and genre of bomba as its own epistemology. The ethnographic portion of my project begins shortly after Hurricane Maria during my predissertation fieldwork in July 2018.

Bomba as Black Puerto Rican Music: Afro-Caribbean Knowledge Production and Approaches to Lived Experiences

Bomba's origins have been traced to the Akan people of what is now Ghana (Vega Drouet 1979). The earliest documentation of bomba is by a French botanist, Andre Pierre Ledu, in 1797 where he describes what he saw as "bomba." However, from his description of the instruments present (the guitar and tambourine), someone familiar with Puerto Rican genres would associate these with *plena*[6]. Since this documentation, bomba and plena have been grouped together as interchangeable and inseparable genres in scholarship and popular culture. Contemporarily, this makes sense as most practitioners of these genres are from Afro-Puerto Rican families and can perform both[7]. As a genre, bomba has been discussed and analyzed from ethnomusicological perspectives since the US Occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898. Social scientists and folklorists were among the first to document bomba (Mason 1914). Over time, these documentations have become invaluable to the bomberx community when they are given the ability to access these "treasures." However, these wax recordings and field journals exist as

[6] I am referencing a translation of Ledu's notes was included by Yvonne Daniel (2011).
[7] For more on plena, see Murray-Irizarry (2018).

a part of the United States colonial investment in Puerto Rico and, as such, should be regarded as far from objective. Moving from a taxonomical assessment of the island's culture, ethnomusicologists then began to discuss bomba as it pertains to its place in Puerto Rican history and its relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As a reflection of the academy's patriarchal framing, most of these researchers were men, and their interests tended to reflect that. Most focused on the principal drumming techniques of bomba, the apprenticeship associated with becoming a *primo,* or the various rhythmic influences in bomba from Africa and other Caribbean islands. Other studies focused on extensive documentation of bomba throughout the island and the differences between regional stylings (Barton 1996; Ferrera 1999; Dufrasne 1986). Their documentation is a starting point for beginning to understand how bomba exists on the island. However, even then, studies focus on the principal drummer's talent and improvisational techniques or the metric stylings of each rhythm. Investigations on rhythmic categorization I feel have been exhausted, but there is still much room to discuss how the music functions in relation to practitioners' lives and Puerto Rican history and culture writ large.

In recent scholarship centering on bomba, there is a homing in on the ways in which practitioners are using the genre and its inscribed epistemologies to theorize not only about bomberxs, but also Puerto Rican society more broadly. Traditionally, bomba has been an artform that has been examined and analyzed outside of its position within the social currents it is adjoined to. However, Carlos Pastrama (2009) does an extraordinary job of highlighting how the longstanding positions of drummer and dancer mirror the gendered and cultural labor consistently found in Puerto Rican spaces. In her article, "Bomba Trigueña," Melanie Maldonado Diaz (2008) begins to note stylistic changes within the performance of bomba and how they correlated to the migration patterns to and from Puerto Rico, as a part of the United

States' colonial projects. Maldonado Diaz' work provides the foundation for the important trajectory that gender and sexuality take. This becomes most evident in her latest article, "Suelta el mono" in the Center for Puerto Rican Studies' journal edition on bomba (2019), as Maldonado Diaz explicitly elevates and centers women practitioners in bomba through oral history and genealogical work. As such, this is an exciting time for bomba and for those with a vested academic interest.

By centering bomba as the oldest genre of music in Puerto Rico, as practitioners have, we then acknowledge that music and performance are epistemologies and archives themselves (Taylor 2017). We can utilize bomba as a site for further inquiry towards understanding the Black history of Puerto Rico which anthropologist Oscar Lewis claimed did not exist. In his ethnographic study of an Afro-Puerto Rican family in *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty–San Juan and New York*, Lewis claimed that "Puerto Rico cannot point to a great Indian or Negro past. Nor are Puerto Rican Negroes especially conscious of their own distinctive African origins" (1966, 3). However, many other studies point to bomba as the well from which Afro-Puerto Rican culture flows as scholars discuss it in relation to hip hop (Flores 2000), reggaeton (Rivera 2015), and even the more popular NuyoRican genre of salsa (Aparicio 1998). By deploying bomba as a focus of study, it is inevitable and necessary that Puerto Rico shifts back into the Black geography from which the United States worked so hard to separate it (Godreau & Lloréns 2010). Bomba locates Puerto Rico within a distinct Black history and reality. It forcefully re-emphasizes its Caribbean positionality instead of its American predicament.

In his canonical essay, "El pais de cuatro pisos," Jose Luis González (1980) argued that the occupation of Puerto Rico has prompted a more precise and rigorous discourse about the

state of Puerto Rican culture. In his essay, he champions Afro-Puerto Rican contributions as what is presently considered Puerto Rican culture. The legacy of Puerto Rican benevolent slavery and *blanqueamiento* has been critiqued by anthropologist Isar Godreau (2015), and has been recognized by other Puerto Rican anthropologists, like Jorge Duany (2002) and Arlene Davila (1997), as a tool of nation-shaping within the American political project of Puerto Rico. By positioning Puerto Rico's role within the Transatlantic Slave Trade as benevolent or "not as bad" as its North American counterparts, the United States was able to frame the history of enslavement on the island to further push the racial democratic narrative or the narrative of *mestizaje* on the island[8]. The idealized peaceful mixing of races and cohabitation on the island allowed for officials in both Puerto Rico and the United States to ignore discrimination and violence perpetuated against Afro-Puerto Ricans and whiten Puerto Rico from a global perspective.

It is this silencing and erasure of antiblack violence that has made me develop a negative reaction to the emphasis of a mixed-race Puerto Rican society that has previously marked racial discourse in Puerto Rican (Duany 2002; Scarano 1996) and ethnographic studies (Lewis 1966; Barton 1996) of Puerto Rico. The fixation on racial castes within Puerto Rico has long obscured the lived conditions of Afro-descended peoples. However, the accountability of strengthening narratives that center nonblack people of color does not fully fall on researchers. Many governing officials and cultural workers themselves perpetuated such narratives. In *Taino*

[8] Racial Democracy is a concept originating for racial formations and narratives in Brazil, to mean and assume that racial mixing is harmonious, and that racism is not a problem in these nations. Earlier anthropologists like Ruth Landes approached studies in Brazil this way and more recent studies of state sanctioned violence in Brazil (Smith 2016) illustrate how antiblackness is still a structuring ideology within Brazil and more broadly Latin America. Arlene Davila and other Puerto Rican scholars have discussed the mythologized origins of Puerto Rican culture and how a politically oriented narrative pushes the idea that European, Indigenous, and Black people coexisted peacefully and so that their descendants should presently coexist. This harmonious mixing is typical of mestizaje discourse (see Anzaldúa 1987), however I am pushing for a more mulataje-based approach.

Revival (2001) most notably, Jorge Duany and Miriam Jiménez Román demonstrate that the emphasis on the Indigenous legacy of Taínos within Puerto Rican sociocultural discourse often was at the expense and erasure of Black Puerto Ricans.

Furthermore, José Luis González in "Pais de cuatro pisos" names Black Puerto Ricans, or the enslaved Africans brought to Puerto Rico and their descendents, as the true purveyors of Puerto Rican culture. In fact, he specifically names real Puerto Ricans as those Black (Puerto Rican) people who play bomba. With this in mind, the Cepeda Family mantra rings true. "Puerto Rico es bomba." If we center bomba, what has been called the oldest genre in the world's oldest Latin American colony by Puerto Ricans, we can discursively shift the landscape of Puerto Rican history and sidestep imperial narratives, thereby centering Black Puerto Ricans and also enmeshing Puerto Rico with the rest of the Caribbean.

For this reasoning, as well as the ethnographic evidence collected from my field research, I do not position my work, theorizations, or bomba within a school of thought that forefronts Indigenous legacies or creolization as synonymous with nonblackness. I scaffold my conceptualizations within the intellectual vein of Black studies discourses to mirror the ways my interlocutors describe bomba, which is as Black music. This is not to say I am dispelling any potential of indigenity embedded within Puerto Ricans and their traditions, however I am rejecting the tokenization of Indigenous peoples and refusing the disciplinary obsession of nativism (Baker 1998). Bomba, as signaled by the Taíno word "batey," could very well be symptomatic of what Tiffany Lethabo King theorizes as the "the Black pore" (2019). The Black pore, King explains, marks geographies and practices where Afro-Indigenous solidarities and futures are cemented together through a joint historical subjection under colonialism. Unlike the Arawak legacies and identities found throughout the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean that are

understood as Afro-Indigenous, within the context of Puerto Rican identity, Taíno-ness is sifted until it is sanitized of all blackness.

Yo soy caribeño

At a cafe once, I sat at a table with a visibly or undeniably Black Puerto Rican of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent. We were joined by a Puerto Rican of Lebanese and Italian descent who could have been categorized as white, both were born in Puerto Rico[9]. Both of these women acknowledged they are Black and white respectively but found *caribeña* to be a more fitting identifier. Caribeña as a cultural positioning (re)emphasizes Puerto Rico as a precarious colony much like other nearby islands, without overshadowing how global antiblackness structures the world. In fact, identifying as Caribbean or caribeñx is a geopolitical identifier that presumes a shared experience of Black culture in the wake of Transatlantic slavery and the consequences of settler or conquistador colonialism. Such naming does not deny a racial phenotype that works in tandem to sculpt life experiences and while there is more conceptualizing to be done in terms of the material effects and affects of being caribeñx, it is far more generative to my project and honest in terms of how bomba practitioners view themselves and the work they do.

I am intentional in my positioning of bomba within Afro-Caribbean/Black geographies and intellectual discourses. As seen through my critical unfolding of *caribeñidad*, it is not a racial identifier that allows white people to claim blackness, instead it is descriptive of a lived experience within a culture that is sedimented by Black traditions. But I am also aware of the critiques of bomba scholarship. Some of these canonical works on bomba have exoticized and exploited it and its proximity to blackness on the island, and in the public racial imaginary for

[9] Here, I am using Black and white as understood within the context of American racial binaries.

academic purposes. Such a historicization of bomba being tethered to blackness and the memory of enslavement in Puerto Rico could provoke nostalgia that mutes current Black narratives in Puerto Rico. Godreau describes this process and its result as a "folkloric blackness," which obfuscates the contemporary Black experiences outside of bomba on the island. These scripts of blackness are also a by-product of the United States' imperialistic plan to sanitize blackness and public anxiety about a racially mixed territory in their empire during the Jim Crow era in the southern states (2015). As I will detail throughout this dissertation, blackness is everywhere in Puerto Rico, and if you are Black in Puerto Rico, your experiences will inevitably be different than a white-passing or lighter-skinned person in Puerto Rico. That is why I take the critiques of Black Puerto Rican anthropologists (Godreau 2015; Lloréns 2014) so seriously. They have argued that academics and colonial policies have aided in the erasure of Afro-Puerto Ricans. These geographical locations of blackness render Afro-Puerto Ricans found outside of them invisible as well as cloak their everyday concerns and triumphs. My own ethnographic study finds bomba everywhere in Puerto Rico, not just in Loiza or Ponce, where many other studies have been focused.

Studies on racialization within music, particularly bomba, have emerged during a time when Afro-Puerto Ricanness is becoming ever more discussed and analyzed. More pointedly, Bárbara Abadía Rexach's *musicalizando la raza en la bomba* (2012) examines how and why bomba is continuing to take center stage in Puerto Rican cultures and imaginaries and how practitioners' racial consciousness might be shaped through practicing bomba. The focus on agency and the unromanitcization of everyday acts of resistance inside and outside of bomba is important. It is a departure from how anthropology as a discipline established Puerto Rico in academic contexts from a perspective of deficiency. Likewise, Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez, in

her recent book *Decolonizing Diasporas* (2020), works to re-emphasize Puerto Rico within the Afro-Atlantic world and analyzes the costs of colonialism within hispanophone diasporic literature by using texts, including song, to map out possible futures. By focusing on dance and dancing, I am able to join the ever-burgeoning work that combats prescriptive theorizations like *mulataje*, which falls in line with the intellectual tradition that foregrounds non-blackness.

Dance anthropologist's Yvonne Daniel has argued for historical research of Black dance, but champions dancing as a methodology to fully understand cultural importance, especially for Black researchers. She highlights the fascination of religious studies and possession/trance within Black dance scholarship but argues that aside from spectacle, Black dance offers an embodied knowledge and connection between the past and present for practitioners in both religious performances (2005) and secular ones (1995). This textured connection, she points out, has eluded most Caribbeanists when dance is a primary social history and past time. Furthermore, Daniel concludes that dance, particularly Caribbean dance, is a type of "social medicine" establishing an intersection between Black dance and affect, which is the cornerstone of my research.

I am less interested in prescribing the participants of my ethnographic study an ethnoracial position within the racial grammar of American empire. Like Daniel, I believe that to fully understand what is happening within bomba, I had to dance. Also, like Daniel, upon dancing, I was able to see the value in what is being done through participation in bomba throughout history, rather than being occupied with legibility. I see dance and dancers as more generative departure sites for understanding inherited embodied knowledge and everyday interventions of precarious colonial subjects and their endurance. In fact, I believe it is the dexterous inscriptive processes within the tradition of bomba that prompt bomberxs to lean into a

less legible identifier like caribeñx and complicate the empire's binary of white and Black. Caribeñx exists because of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and works against an imperial sanitization.

Affective Archives and Emotional Dexterity: Black Feminism and Resistencia throughout the Storms

I wrote in my field work journal, "no one writes about the waiting during field work, maybe it is because as much as people emphasize the everyday occurrences nothing about normal excites a person." In August 2018, towards the end of my predissertation field research, I met Melanie Maldonado . I had spent most of my trip waiting to make contact and playing phone tag with various bomba practitioners. Finally, with only three days left before returning to the States, I made contact with someone.

I found it funny that Melanie was the first one to get back to me even though she did not even live in Puerto Rico. In fact, as fate would have it she received my Facebook message inquiring about a possible meeting as she was landing in Puerto Rico. She replied to me while waiting to exit the plane that she had arrived in Puerto Rico to help execute a resource drive and programming effort to assist in bringing aid to Puerto Rico and St. Croix . The part of *Ritmos Resiliente: 4546 razones para sanar* taking place in Puerto Rico that summer was a four day tour after Hurricane Maria. Each day would take place in a different *pueblo* or *municipio* in Puerto Rico. Melanie and her co-conspirator, Kojo, who was assisting with crowdsourcing from D.C. elected to bring material necessities like water purification tablets, life straws, books, batteries, and first aid kits to the pueblos of Mayagüez, Ponce, Loiza, and Humacao; all of whom are known for their place in Afro-Puerto Rican history.

Beyond the supplies, Melanie assisted Kojo by making sure each event in a was tailored to the specific needs of the community they would be visiting. For example, some locations had speakers discussing dietary needs, others discussed the rise of gender violence and the importance of mental health. All of the topics, I noticed, seemed to sidestep what I thought was the biggest issue.

The devastation of Hurricane Maria was evident everywhere I looked, from the moment I landed in Puerto Rico to the minute I met Melanie in Loiza. Roofs were still missing from homes, what was once beachfronts were heavily soiled with sediment, trash, and overrun with water. Melanie proved to be one of the most knowledgeable and resourceful people I would come into contact with throughout the time of my research. She remarked at how everything was different now. It was her first time returning to Puerto Rico since the Hurricane. Historic sites that she knew were in ruins and were also in danger of being demolished as more and more people began to see Puerto Rico as a space of opportunity. But Melanie and Kojo saw Puerto Rico as a place in dire need of healing. So, in addition to the intentional and specific programming within the itinerary of *Ritmos Resiliente*, each site would also include acupuncture and reiki healing and then would close each session with capoeira and bomba. These dances were intentionally included to remind people that Afro-descended people everywhere, who had sent resources and showed up to assist with the healing collective, did not forget them and were offering care.

As I talked with Melanie, laughing about our shared disdain for mosquitoes and also the smell of insect repellant spray, one of her friends who works with Collectivo Ilé in Puerto Rico joined our chat as we waited for other attendees and teammates to arrive to begin setting up the space for that afternoon's event. This woman who had lived in Loiza her entire life remarked to

Melanie how this event would be especially needed today. For a minute there, I don't think she realized I spoke and understood Spanish, or maybe she didn't care. But she continued on that her husband was not in the best mood because one of the youth he was working with had been shot to death and leaving many of the other young people angry as they had to sort through their own feelings. She was hoping the evening event would be an option for people to attend rather than being left to their own vices. Her eyes were not filled with tears but were ponds that seemed to hold hope and sorrow. Before Melanie could really respond, her phone rang. She had to run off to complete a quick errand but should be back before everything started.

As she briskly walked back to her car, Melanie started talking about how that type of violence and death was beginning to mark life in Puerto Rico and that healing would just be beginning. For Melanie, this type of organizing is how to heal her people and how to fill a spiritual and material need. It is her intimate care that propels her community work. This leads me to discuss Black feminist praxis, affect, and emotion and how *Black Latinx Dexterity* enters and adds to these discussions.

Bomba and its varying rhythms, with their various emotional expectations, provided a generative grounding for a discourse on Afro-Puerto Rican embodiment and affect. Bomba is not only performed in the archipelago, but also all throughout the States. Due to this, it also attends to the ways in which the Puerto Rican experience, as violently prompted by colonialism, is shaped by what Afro-Puerto Rican scholar and literary critic Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez (2020) calls *destierro.* Figueroa-Vásquez positions destierro as uprootedness and sense of loss that marks Puerto Rican ontology. It is this continuous dispossession that Puerto Ricans in the diaspora are born with, and that many Puerto Ricans in the largest exodus since Operation Bootstrap are currently facing. Bomba becomes a place of care and intimacy that is not affixed to

constraining spatial and temporal guidelines that allows Puerto Ricans to navigate that deep loss and make space for other emotions in their daily lives.

One could even argue it is a preservation or navigation that characterizes the Black feminine experience in the New World. *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) is an example of the work that Black feminist scholars do: highly theoretical and methodologically sound but with a fierce compassion. Hartman again sets out to reclaim the rupture that was enacted from the middle passage in *Lose Your Mother* (2006) as she follows her genealogy back to Ghana. Hartman describes the fracturing of familial memory as a result of the middle passage but also at the same time describes how that act of searching for strangers allowed her to approach most historical subjects she came across with the same intimacy she would have with a family member. *Lose Your Mother* is both, a historiographic work and an affective work driven by a desire and oneself being allowed to reclaim the unknown.

Black Latinx Dexterity is written with and for the community of bomberxs I was fortunate enough to meet. I lean into Hartman's frameworks, provoked by an accountability for academic scholarship to take into account that their work is inherently political, but also personal. That intellectual work, that is oftentimes viewed as inaccessible, is the lens through which many Afro-descendants are viewed and in turn view themselves.

Black feminists have been critiqued for their defensiveness, so it is important to note that defending oneself is oftentimes an act of protecting oneself, especially in a world that regards one as nonhuman. Sharpe has continued to probe at the ideation of the felt experience of blackness since *Monstrous Intimacies* (2009) and her deconstruction and interrogation of what intimacies were afforded to Black women. Her later work continues in that vein: in *In the Wake* (2016), she articulates how Black people, and more particularly Black women, are always in a

state of grief due to the constant violence targeting the Black community. Black women are always engaging in what she calls "wake-work" and this constant state of grieving without the ability or resources to process the continuous trauma that they are impacted is what Sharpe calls "weathering." Borrowing from environmental studies and the ways that structures deteriorate slowly due to constant precipitation and winds, she argues that the historically informed infrastructural stressors placed on Black women contribute to their weathering. I have framed bomba as wake work and its place under such a category is evident from its inceptions and its projects in its future. Weathering, as a result of an antiblack state, mirrors the exhaustion felt by Afro-Puerto Rican women who must endure under colonial time. *Black Latinx Dexterity* examines and maps out this endurance through affect within the genre of bomba.

Wynter (1990) argues that women are oftentimes accepted as a part of society, or rather they are understood to be a part of society, but they are so oppositional to what is deemed normal that their existence operates on a different realm entirely. Perhaps, it is this otherness, which is a byproduct of white supremacy and patriarchy, that relegates Black women to be considered unreal and thus fungible, existing, as Wynter argues, on an almost supernatural plane. Wynter argues that this plane is paranormal because Black women are understood to have human capabilities, but their humanity becomes unrecognizable, much like ghosts. McKittrick (2006), a human geographer, sets out to find Black women in history and finds them not as people, but rather as objects or phantoms. She argues that it is the objectification of Black women historically and structurally that leaves them to occupy a subjectivity that exists to the majority within the paranormal. Black women become ghosts, or shadows of people that have been villainized or demonized in mainstream society and within history. *Black Latinx Dexterity*

attempts a similar type of project by focusing on the histories of feeling and using the often-discarded bodies of Afro-Puerto Rican women to be the focus and bomba as a method to do so.

To feel pain and desire where personhood was denied, and continues to be denied, combats an objectified subjectivity. In *Uses of the Erotic*, Lorde (1985) argues that within the non-Western feminine spiritual plane exists the erotic. The erotic is described as totally encompassing force that is occupied by the spiritual, physical, and mental within the colonized subject. The ability to feel, as a colonized subject or dehumanized object, was in itself an act of resistance. It is the act of reclamation and total ownership of oneself under duress that underscores the erotic.

Feminine reclamation and affective labor happen in everyday routines throughout the Black Atlantic. There is still so much more to document through ethnographic research. Aimee Cox (2015) highlights young Detroit girls and their experienced negotiation of their marginalized identities in *Shapeshifters.* She highlights one avenue of reclamation in their art, affirming the earlier work of another Black feminist anthropologist, Deborah Thomas. Thomas did her ethnography on Jamaican racial politics and within a globalized era. In particular, Thomas describes how women used dancehall culture to create a diasporic feminism of sorts which she called “ghetto feminisms” (2004, 253). It was in that arena that Jamaican women made space to critique patriarchal standards and also exercise agency over their marginalized bodies. The way women in Jamaica navigated their liminality was similar to the young girls in Detroit, however they presented this reclamation in different ways. Thomas goes on to say that ghetto feminisms are different than earlier Black feminisms anchored in respectability politics but were akin to the emerging hip hop feminisms being produced at the time.

The Pursuit of Happiness (2018) describes middle-aged Black American women who travel to Jamaica to escape their daily lives, which are fraught with racism, economic stress, and grief. Bianca Williams highlights the ways these frequent visitors of Jamaica are engaging in remaking and (re)engaging the diaspora with their experiences in a place where blackness is not uncommon but where their nationality becomes more prevalent. This project engages in diasporic theorizations of blackness and also the history of blackness, showing the differences noted by Thomas and also highlighting how diasporic scholarship can be complicated. Williams (2018, 62) also highlights the ways that nonacademic Black women engage in praxis, writing "They do not have the pleasure or privilege of thinking about feeling, emotion, or affect as abstract ideas that one can pontificate or theorize about for sport. Their engagement with transnational and diasporic processes in their pursuits of happiness is about praxis and not simply about the theoretical." It is their seeking out, their traveling that has been informed by their thoughts about their desires. It is the action and the thinking that make up a praxis, especially a Black feminist one.

The vernacular became a spiritual experience anchored in the erotic reclamation and liberation of Black women, unhinging Black feminine humanity from the exoticized religious space to which it was tethered in earlier studies. My project joins these studies in examining the ways that reclamation, borne out of the diasporic tradition of the erotic, is enacted and used to navigate Afro-Puerto Rican women's second-class citizenship. It joins the rich theoretical history that Black feminists carved out and advocated. It is also in discussion with current scholarship, like *Afro-Paradise* (2016), an ethnography where Christen Smith examines the performances of Afro-Brazilians in theatre troupes. These performances take place at historical sites and reference historical events adjoined to slavery in Brazil in which young people are oftentimes drawing

parallels to the state-sanctioned violence happening in Brazil contemporarily. Smith builds on Spillers' and Sharpe's theorization of Black mothering and grieving to elucidate how Afro-Brazilian mothers' grief is oppositional to the state's necropolitics and dehumanizing police violence imposed on young Afro-Brazilians. Smith straddles theory and ethnography in a manner that challenges what Black feminist Jennifer Nash proposed for the future of Black feminist studies (2019). Nash said there must be a "letting go" within Black feminist scholarship instead of the "holding on" to the past practices. I believe that bomba is the tradition in which both holding on and letting go is possible for Afro-Puerto Rican women.

Black feminists are concerned with how the intersecting identities of Blackness and womanhood are not taken seriously or given rigorous thought. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) highlighted with her theory of intersectionality, Black women's identities are what makes them most vulnerable to violence. Although Crenshaw meant physical violence, there has been an exploration of the symbolic violence that culminates to physical violence by Black feminists. To rectify this, Black feminists produced scholarship undergirded by what Nash (2019) calls a "defensiveness" as they set out to carve out space to make room for their work. Nash (2019, 3) imagines Black feminism as "an affective project–a felt experience–as much as it is an intellectual, theoretical, creative, political, and spiritual tradition". Or what Brendane Tynes (2020) names as a (queer) Black feminist ethics of care and which also aligns with Ashanté Reese's (2019) distinction that self-reliance within a community is refusal against white supremacist structural violence through care of self and kin. In 2019, *The Black Latinas Know Collective* was formed, marking a shift in popular culture and academic discourse that centered the lives and work of Afro-Latinas as a part of and not separate from that of Black feminist discourses more broadly. *Black Latinx Dexterity* operates with the same understanding that it

does a disservice to not engage with scholars in anglophone parts of the world and particularly with Black American thinkers, as Puerto Rico is a colony of America.

The study of affect in anthropology or the affective turn, as Sara Ahmed (2010) points out, has already been happening. Feminist researchers and Black feminist scholars have long centered affect or the lived experience. Anthropology locates affect beyond the personal and within an objective sphere. The philosopher Brian Massumi (2015) follows affect within the political context of international conflict. Affect, feminist anthropologist Kathleen Stewart demythologizes, are the things that happen every day. In *Ordinary Affects* (2007), Stewart calls attention to how affect, although abstract, is not a nebulous entity. In her experimental ethnography, she repositions and highlights how Black scholars and feminists have long encountered and studied feminism in their inquiries centering on the lived experience. For that reason, I center my investigation on affect within the context of Black feminism and feminist thought and not necessarily the anthropology of affect. My own understanding of the curvatures between affect and emotion rest on the fact that emotions are fluctuating and personally experienced, whereas affect is static, almost akin to sedimented ideologies.

Affective archives have come into recent Black feminist scholarship more and more as a way of centering the humanity of Black women throughout history, and thus, by doing so, scholars can better look at the present and towards the future with a more critical eye. *Black Latinx Dexterity* is a project that sets out to do just that. Throughout the dissertation, I try to make sense of the present, the past, and contemplate what the future can look like while preserving and emphasizing the humanity of Afro-Puerto Rican women.

When researching Black women in the archive one must be ready to face dehumanization and violence over and over again. However, in “Venus in Two Acts,” Saidiya Hartman (2008)

says, “No more.” She instead uses her imagination and multiple sources of historical material to piece together a world in which women, who were often left disfigured by the violence that bound them to colonial records, could be full persons. Her intervention of critical fabulation uses beauty as an antidote to the violence that followed Afro-diasporic women. Following in that same vein, in *Dispossessed Lives* (2016), Marisa Fuentes crafts a historiography of several women living in colonial Barbados using the very same type of world making strategies so that in death their personhood could be preserved. Jessica Johnson, in *Wicked Flesh* (2020), offers another intervention of understanding the physical acts and embodied attitudes that allowed for understanding Afro-Atlantic enslaved femmes through her theorization of Black femme freedom, which is the practice of freedom and its embodiment. Black femme freedom allowed women, who were often fungible and the most vulnerable within society, to stand in defense of themselves and each other while building intimate kin networks. These are the historians *Black Latinx Dexterity* is most concerned with and the discourses and poetics of care and refusal that Chapter Four is written for.

Black feminist historians have used care as an integral intention while excavating Black feminine narratives. Likewise, Black feminist ethnographers deploy a similar praxis centering care in documenting and thinking through Black life and surrounding discourses. Some, as previously discussed, like Smith’s *Afro-Paradise* (2016), use mothering as an analytic of care within the Black feminine affect. Most recently, Deborah Thomas (2019, 2) proposed an affective archive, one that emphasizes affective dimensions beyond visuality, as a new approach to ethnographic studies. Thomas argues that it is through intimacies of ethnographic witnessing, which implicates accountability and responsibility on the part of the ethnographer, that will produce affective archives. Intimacy is the key posture in developing affective archives which

positions bomba and its batey as a site throughout Puerto Rican history which has thrived off of and continues to cultivate intimacy. Furthermore, Thomas emphasizes archival cultivation through attentive embodied care, positioning my focus on dance and bomberas within bomba as an optimal methodology and my intervention of affective archive compilation as an optimal practice.

Bomberas and the practice of bomba become the perfect place to map out the emotional dexterity needed by colonial subjects to adapt to the continuous monotony of violence. Bomba's varying rhythms and matching emotional expectation enables Afro-Puerto Rican women to mitigate their grief, allowing them to continue their daily task of enduring under coloniality. After Maria, and then again after the earthquakes that began in 2019, bomberas were both disillusioned with and seasoned by imperial neglect. In song lyrics, during bombazos and in daily conversation, bomberas adamantly comment on the ways in which "relief" efforts from the States are not enough, and that as a community, Puerto Ricans continue to support themselves because there is a distrust that the government will follow through. By positioning bomberxs as only able to rely on themselves instead of governmental agencies like FEMA or appointed officials like the financial oversight committee, I continue to see bomberas broadening their willful defiance of the state to incorporate a recentering of themselves as a people. I see refusal as a useful analytic to describe the actions of bomberas inside and outside of the batey. Moreover, I see it being generative for the tradition of bomba. Performance studies scholar Fred Moten, in *In the Break* (2003), likens refusal typical of Black aesthetics to an ongoing and reconstructive improvisation of ensemble. The genre of bomba is one dependent on ensemble and improvisation, allowing me to not only locate practitioners as agents of refusal, but also the tradition of bomba itself. The batey is dependent on more than just one person or element of

bomba. In fact, like other Afro-diasporic dance traditions, its dance circle has continued to survive because of its communal nature. In *Black Food Geographies* (2019), anthropologist Ashanté Reese sees refusal anchored in self-reliance amongst Black residents in Washington D.C. who live in areas relegated as food deserts yet continue to grow their own produce in community gardens. Throughout my project, as I detail, there are instances of willful ensemble defiance and also self-reliance based out of distrust and community-centered care throughout the lives of bomberas.

In my own project, I see refusal as individual and collective acts within the lives of bomberas that enable them to endure under the United States imperial neglect. Not only is refusal ingrained within the Afro-diasporic practice of Puerto Rican bomba, but as bomberas continue to engage with the batey, with expansive and adjoining intimacy throughout the Puerto Rican diaspora, they refuse in the nonspectacular moments of life as well. I detail bomberas' refusal in the wake of Hurricane Maria, political corruption, earthquakes, a global pandemic, and again during state-sanctioned antiblack murder, but also in their daily lives which are undoubtedly marked by the ultimate disaster of colonialism. But, as Deborah Thomas states (2019, 2) "refusal is practice-oriented and quotidian, non-eventful and deeply historical and relational." In her discussion of an affective archive within (post)colonial Jamaica, Thomas frames refusal as marking a shift away from resistance. For me, this is validated by the moments where bomberas accept their realities, but they refuse to stay in them and instead lean into the batey and their elders. Yomaira Figueroa-Vasquez in "Afro-Boricua Archives" (2020) details refusal as "a practice of learning other/ed histories and being present and available to see these as a form of love and fury and understanding them as palimpsest," and that is what I sought out to do in *Black Latinx Dexterity.*

Black Latinx Dexterity enters the tradition of Afro-Boricua refusal by occupying a willfully defiant positioning that privileges historical texts unconcerned with lives of Afro-Puerto Rican women. By centering my practice and study on the lives and within the embodied ontologies of bomberas, this project bends its ear and eyes to what colonialism has intentionally tried to erase and silence. It is with looking backwards and simultaneously forwards that *Black Latinx Dexterity* attempts to understand the beautiful, heart wrenching, and ugly truths that lay in the lives within bomberas.

Refusal has been linked to scholars of marginalized peoples, and within my own investigations, it is a recurring and organic discourse in which bomba and bomberxs are deeply immersed. Despite the policing of the genre through sound ordinances and Slave Codes, the practice has continued. It is this "willful defiance" from "within the colonial structure that can also extend beyond such a structure*"* that Black feminist anthropologist Savannah Shange (2019, 94) uses in her own theorizations about Black girl refusal within public schools in San Francisco. Shange scaffolds her understanding of refusal with that of Indigenous feminist anthropologist Audra Simpson who, in her ethnography, *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014), uses refusal as an analytic for the ways the Mohawk nation continue to act out sovereignty. For Simpson she sees refusal as a rejection of "the gifts of the state," one of these gifts being citizenship (2014, 12). Both Shange and Simpson center on the ways in which women and girls, the most vulnerable under colonialism's violent patriarchal infrastructure, display refusal in the most remarkable moments of daily life . Thus, I am propelled to examine how bomberas act out refusal not only within the batey, but also within their daily lives. As some of the (if not the) most vulnerable colonized subjects, bomberas continue to vehemently oppose and publicly critique the Puerto Rican local and the United States national administrations.

***La Rueda De La Vida (The wheel of life):* Indigo and that eventful night**

That night with Indigo was a gift. While chaotic and stressful, looking back on it, there is so much there. Some might say that bomba was only present in the beginning of the night, and they wouldn't be wrong, but they aren't right either. Just like the night, my project is not just about bomba. My project respects bomba as worthy of focused ethnographic study while also realizing its potential as a site and method towards further studying the embodied historical and present realities of Afro-Puerto Ricans in the world and not just in Puerto Rico.

Indigo learned bomba mainly through her time at Taller Bombalele in the Bay Area yet was respected enough to be celebrated and affirmed during her cuembé at the Cepeda home. Her daily life experiences certainly differ from those of other Afro-Puerto Rican women on the archipelago, but the structural and ever enduring antiblack and patriarchal violence that shapes even the most intimate curvatures of their lives remain the same. This is why Indigo deploys the same types of affective states found in bomberas regardless of being a DiaspoRican. She claimed her space on the dance floor as if it was a batey (affirmation). She saw a man become a victim of violence and immediately sprang into caring for him (acknowledgment). As the epigraph states, bomba has made her walk different (accountability). Through her immersion and dedication to this ancestral tradition, Indigo has allowed herself to be changed by bomba and enact change because of bomba.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1:, "*Oi una voz divina (I heard a divine voice)*: The *Batey*, Choreographing Emotional Dexterity and Compiling Affective Archives," joins Sandra Ruiz (2019) in her

argument that the ontological positionality of *Ricanness* is one of endurance against colonial time. I draw on Jessica Johnson's Black femme freedom practices (2020) as a means of enduring perpetual colonialism, further implicating bomba and the batey within Black femme geographies of freedom. I turn towards studies of embodiment (Lorde 1978; Ellis 2015) and studies of Afro-diasporic temporalities (Hanchard 1999; Wright 2015) to map out the affective states of Afro-Puerto Rican women and use bomba's rhythms to examine how thick and varying emotions and their release, or what I call emotional dexterity, becomes embodied and readily available to use in the lives of Black Puerto Rican bomba practitioners. I examine how affective archives and emotional dexterity come into play in the lives of Afro-Puerto Rican women in Puerto Rico and in the States.

Chapter 2, "*Yo la bomba no la bailé, la bomba yo la vivé (I didn't just dance bomba I lived it)*:" Urban Blackness, Pedagogy, and Dancing through Daily Life," follows the women who are considered *mayores* or, as I call them, *figuras*. These figuras illustrate how bomba and bomberxs not only use their embodied knowledge within the batey, but throughout their daily lives. By focusing on their pedagogical and protest methods, I examine how bomba elicits correction and accountability within Puerto Rican society. Even further, I examine how this network of bomberxs created by the tight knit relationships between these figuras acts as a salve. This salve functions at the interpersonal level of participation, but also at a structural level across bomba and the network of bomberxs who, for example, engage in mutual aid relief in the face of post-Maria neglect. Puerto Ricans in the diaspora use bomba as a balm, not only for the uprootedness that Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez (2020) calls destierro, but as a means of supporting more vulnerable Puerto Ricans on the island.

In “Chapter 3: *No Me Va a Dar (You’re not going to hit me)*: Gender Violence, Social Movements, and Dancing Through the Diaspora,” I examine how gender violence plagues Afro-Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and its diaspora and how bomba and its pedagogy account for this historic subjection. Moreover, I analyze diasporic interactions during moments drenched in political potential like protests in the Summer of 2019, as well as during the continued #NiUnaMas and #SayHerName demonstrations that took place on social media and in the news. Through a bomba *taller* with women in Mexico, I examine how bomba might offer non-Puerto Ricans the capacity to be changed and navigate their daily circumstances.

In “Chapter 4: *Un Belen para los nombrado y los sin nombres (A song of lament for the named and unnamed):* Afro-Puerto Rican Women, the Archive, and Historicization,” I join archival research with current methods of historicization used by bomberxs to further connect them to their historical figures and pasts. I give the Fernando Pico collection a Black feminist treatment following Saidiya Hartman's intervention of critical fabulation (2008), as well as modeling strategies that contemporary bomberxs use, culminating in what I call a bombastic approach to history. I then finish up the chapter by elucidating the contours of memory and history to privilege the site of the body through bomba's treatment of mayores or elders.

Chapter 1

"*Oi una voz divina"* (I heard a divine voice):

En[d]ur[ance], Choreographing Emotional Dexterity, and Compiling Affective Archives[10]

Nosotros solos an army of marathon dancers/
Lovers/seekers/ and collectors/ we have never
met an enemy we can't outlive.
- Alexis Pauline Gumbs[11]

Feelings were not something discussed openly in the Puerto Rican household I grew up in, but they were and are everywhere. I began my undertaking of *bomba* at three different schools, and having been a dancer before college, I knew that my body would remember and adjust accordingly to the various information, techniques, and movements being thrown into it[12]. I just kept telling myself that as long as I could feel the rhythm, I would be okay dancing—whether in the *batey* or in class—and I was. But, then we began to learn *cuembé* at Taller Tambuye in Rio Piedras.

What initially drew me to bomba as a site of study was the immense emotional connection, I felt watching *bomberx* play and dance. Before field research, I remember an all-women bomba group from Chicago coming to Madison's Rathskeller[13]. In a place and time

[10]This song is said to be inspired by Domingo Negrón, who heard a voice while in New York during a misa (spiritual service) that told him to return to Puerto Rico, prompting his return, however many of the southern songs were widely distributed and are often difficult to pinpoint origins (Fernandez Morales 1999, 34; Maldonado Diaz. Interview. Oct 2019). The author of the song is most likely Petrona Guillbe and it is typically arranged to a hólandes rhythm. Both of whom were discussed in Chapter 4.

[11] Printed in the foreward by Alexis Pauline Gumbs in *The Dance We Do: A Poet Explores Black Dance* by Ntzokae Shange (2020) and as was originally performed by Alexis Pauline Gumbs in 2019 at the book release party.

[12] I will be discussing some of the bodily inscription processes later in this chapter and also outline some of these processes during fieldwork in Chapter 2.

[13] This all-women's group is called Las Bombpleneras, an all-women's performance ensemble covering plena and bomba. This Chicago-based group is mentioned in Chapter 2 along with Ivelisse, a figura and one of my mayores/maestras in Chapter 2. They were contracted by the UW-Madison Chicanx and Latinx student organization, MeCha, for an annual festival in response to a critique that their programming should better mirror the diversity present within Latinidad.

where I felt so othered and misunderstood, I saw women not care about the white college-age bystanders who were more focused on drinking beer than on their set. Instead, these women focused on the few people of color in the room and on each other as they moved between songs and rhythms. Songs about heartbreak and anger and empowerment blended into one another as the women organically moved themselves from being singers, to drummers, to dancers. I was caught in the rapture of how intimate the set felt. From the first song, it was like an intimacy hung in the air beckoning me and my friends to come closer and receive their invitation to make that night a memory. That memory is a weighted one, not light like a light FM song, but one that, until this day and I know for days to come, will live inside me, heavy like oatmeal sticking onto my ribs.

I remember it not because it let me escape the troubles I had that year: loved ones passing away suddenly, friends drowning in Lake Mendota, or classes that made me doubt myself. I remember because, at first, the feelings I felt were like an old story that perhaps wasn't mine to begin with but became mine with time. It's a feeling very similar to that of slam poetry or spoken word. I have performed poetry for years. The measure of a good performance for me used to be whether or not someone would approach me afterwards and comment on how they felt immersed in my story, in my poem, in the world I created. The emotional connection in poetry is driven by the lyrical performance and oftentimes, in my experience, it is dependent on the individual performer's ability to project their affective intention onto the audience[14]. In bomba, the emotional labor is one that happens as the dancer connects to that particular moment, that particular song, that particular rhythm, and those particular bomberxs making up the batey. Bomba also requires an affective immersion through training and the ability to connect that

[14] Jose Esteban Muñoz (2006) positions affect as a central function of performance where the performer projects their emotion to the spectator or audience.

moment with all the previous ones.

In this chapter, I am thinking through the embodied practices that are within the batey, the dance circle, and how they work in tandem with *mayores* to preserve an affective archive. This archive, through inscriptive processes, compels bomberxs to continue to utilize it in their daily navigation of carceral and colonial spaces inside and outside of the batey. I took bomba classes with multiple instructors from various regions in Puerto Rico who introduced me to different styles of dancing bomba and their various pedagogies. I join feminist thinkers, affect theorists, and dance scholars in my theorization and compilation of affective archives with the lessons from my mayores and *figuras*[15]. I discuss the emotional dexterity required of Afro-Puerto Rican women to tap into this transferred state of embodiment, where they call upon knowledge that existed long before them and will exist long after them. I intervene into a deeply sensorial discourse by electing to deploy affective archive compilation as a site and method of analyzing the emotional dexterity of Afro-Puerto Rican women. It requires a shift on the part of the reader to think about the ways they experience the world and how they came to be taught to experience it.

In Chapter Two, I highlight the explicit ways figuras teach (Afro)Puerto Rican women to move through the world and also how they teach the world how to treat them[16]. In Chapter Four, the importance of memory and elders within the tradition of bomba is put into conversation with the contemporary movements happening within the bomberx community to excavate and reinforce legacies that have been shrouded by antiblack and/or patriarchal violence. This chapter shifts the typical bodies of literature associated with anthropologies of embodiment,

[15] For more on the mentors and teachers who I call *figuras,* see Chapter 2.
[16] For me (Afro)Puerto Rican is an orthographic way to remind the reader that Puerto Ricans also include Black Puerto Ricans.

anthropologies of affect, and ethnographic methodological interventions. Instead, I enter this discourse as an Afro Latina, as a Black Puerto Rican woman. Thus, I enter with Afro-Puerto Rican women who think with me—the Black feminist thinkers and women of color who have laid the foundation for such inquiry into the aesthetics of survival and poetics of affect.

Yo soy Cimarrona..yo soy la alternative a la cadenza colonial: Choreographing Emotional Dexterity and the Compilation of Affective Archives

(I am a maroon… I am the opposition to the chains of colonialism)

It was unusual to walk into the dance studio and find Maestra in the middle of the floor. Typically, as you would walk up the stairs to the studio and enter through the glass doors, Maestra would be finishing up her previous class and the air would be thick with the reverberations from the drums and we would sit and begin stretching before her other students ended their class and left. I walked in with my friend Lorena and her cousin. We were discussing the *bombazo* we went to that weekend for a birthday celebration and how I was still having trouble distinguishing between the *sicá* rhythm and *una ritmo de cuembé*. As the rest of the class entered, most of them born and raised in Puerto Rico and in some way connected to the Metro area as students or residents, they also looked bewildered at the change of pace[17]. She sat with her *barril*, or barrel drum, in a chair in the center of the dance studio and had us begin to sit around her[18]. Marién, my maestra, had a look of peace and softness, opposed to her typical direct and exacting stature. As we sat around her, she dimmed the lights and instructed us to close our eyes. She began to play a smooth cyclical rhythm. She must have played for at least twenty-five minutes. It was seamless, with no real beginning or end. It felt edgeless as it enveloped us. The

[17] The Metro Area is marked by a not too convenient public transportation system. It colloquially includes San Juan, Carolina, Rio Piedras, parts of Bayamon, and Toa Alto.

[18] Bomba has several types of percussion typically achieved by the maracas, the cua, and the barriles. The modern cua is a raised hollow small barrel drum, that is hit with claves or sticks. The cua was originally a barril turned sideways and struck with a clave. Barril drums are old repurposed rum barrels.

initial pattern of the rhythm stayed consistent as she transitioned into different variants of the drummed rhythm, some bellowing from the center of the drum, deep and loud, but always the same rhythm. Sometimes she would change the positioning of a hit in the pattern so that it struck sharp[19]. Each variation shifted the vibe of the rhythm, and she told us to keep listening with our eyes closed in the already dim room. She told us, in a voice completely different from the one she used to correct our form, "If images or stories come to your mind let them stay there." As she played, it was almost as if the entire busy street gathered outside of the studio's windows were holding their breath, not making a sound to join our aural journey.

Finally, my maestra had us open our eyes. She made us state our names and she had us discuss what the music felt like, what we envisioned while she drummed. I was nervous to say what I thought, mostly because in dance class, I got to take a break from the everyday effort of speaking Spanish and probably exposing myself as someone born in the diaspora. As I began to mentally rehearse my answer, other people began to relay their responses with elaborate scenes. Some said that the rhythm reminded them of a lion slowly circling its prey. Others said it reminded them of sensuality and the ocean with the consistent repetition. For me, I still remember what I saw to this day: a boat, and in it was my dad and paternal grandpa and uncle. They were fishing in the ocean and the tide rocked the boat softly and then more aggressively and softly again as the water lapped up the sides of it, as the moon shone bright in the sky. I recall that daydream almost every time I practice or dance a cuembé or *guembé*[20].

---

[19] The sharpness I am referring to is associated with the *campana* in a *cuembé cangrejero.* A campana can best be translated to "bell" in english. In the context of bomba it most means a hit near the rim of the drum, where your accenting hand is nearly if not actually hitting the metal rim of the drum. For more on regional drumming variation see Barton (1995) and Dufrasne (1985).

[20] Josh Kun (2005, 13) elects to investigate the ways listening to music is not a passive act, instead the listener and music/musician are encountering one another. More specifically, he intervenes in music studies and ethnomusicological studies with audiotopia and positioning (listening to) music as a way to reimagine the present social world, that points us to the possible not the impossible and that doesn't lead us to another world but back to coping with this world.

After we all responded to Marién's prompt, she played the rhythm again and finally named it as cuembé. She said it's a rhythm *de coqueteria*[21] and that it is typically the rhythm where singers shine the most due to the song format. As she spoke about the regional and stylistic differences under the cuembé umbrella within bomba, her drumming played examples. Although cuembé is understood as a rhythm originating in San Mateo de Cangrejo, there are various sonic aesthetic differences. The *cuembé cangrejero* (from San Mateo de Cangrejo) was an upbeat moderately paced rhythm. The cuembé from Cataño was one whose cyclical rhythm was most clearly marked not by a *campana* but a slap bordering on snare. The southern variation was the most different, and rightfully so as it is named guembé and is played from a deeper register in the middle of the barril that relies on bass.

She continued playing and said that it is a rhythm that requires the dancer to be in their body, which I found to be interesting since I think all dance requires an individual to be aware of their body amidst the sound and space they are in. She reinforced the idea that cuembé is a rhythm of flirtation and power. Women, she emphasized, are powerful, and should lean into that power in the rhythm of cuembé, allowing them to realize their desirability along with their feminine power to seduce. Marién was careful to say that although cuembé was about sensuality, it was not about sexuality. She said both are natural but that cuembé is contained. She began to teach us the basic steps for the promenade. We understood that cuembé required a deep bend in the knee and a smooth transition of the weight shifting from one foot to the other, all the while depending on the sway of hips.

And as the class continued to practice, we were instructed to find a bomba song en ritmo de cuembé and practice at home. Over the next few weeks, we would get together to dance and I

[21] *Coqueteria* means flirting in Puerto Rican slang.

realized the sensuality of cuembé was just not hitting for me. I continuously got scolded and corrected for dancing too aggressively or seriously instead of dancing "soft like the ocean." I was not exercising enough control over my body. But, as I worked at the rhythm more and more and then began to dance to songs with lyrics and stories, cuembé made sense in my body. I was able to feel more confident in my body, even just walking around alone. The more I worked and practiced executing cuembé correctly and listened to bomba songs that chronicled flirty and sensual topics, the more aware I became of my own presence in various situations.

When a good *bombera* enters the batey, she already knows and respects the different elements occurring within it. She acknowledges the singer and *primo*. Before recalling the vocabulary of piquetes in her repertoire, she must promenade with the basic step of the rhythm. The *paseo básico* not only leads to the dancer saluting the drummer, propelling them both into an exchanging of respect and movement and sound, but while a dancer is doing their paseo in the batey, they are also falling with the meter and tempo of that particular rhythm, song, and rendition. When I am in the batey, before even breaking into the circle, I pause for a moment and do the basic step in place so that my body remembers the hours spent learning the movements, recalling the various maestras and their style of bomba. I move in a way that beckons to all of their instructions. I settle into myself and the moment, and then I enter. Once in the batey, every rhythm has a particular vocabulary of sound and responding piquetes due to regional aesthetic differences, but a dancer must respect the parameters of the rhythm and a particular song. A bombera must exercise control over her body. She must be *in* her body. This means that once a bombera begins to improvise their choreography with the primo, she is adding not only movements but another percussive layer that has to fit into the sound. It must fit aesthetically and poetically with the rhythm and song being played.

Bomba rhythms and their emotional expectation[22]

Cuembé—sensuality/yearning
Güembé—yearning
Seis Corrido—Sexuality/ Untranslateable pleasure
Yubá—rage/lament/memory
Leró—reverential preservation
Corvé—rage
Belén—memory
Holandés—joy
Sicá—flexibility/story telling

For me, the consistent and varying rhythms in the genre of bomba reflect the various emotions of Afro-Puerto Rican women. My project centers the oldest genre in the world's oldest colony to understand how music and dance evolved to encompass these various emotions. Furthermore, bomba holds lessons or (his)stories within its practice to prepare Black Puerto Ricans if they want to do more than just survive as colonial subjects. Almost every interlocutor mentioned the differences between rhythms, not just in terms of sound, but also in terms of feeling. I build on this common understanding amongst bomberxs about the emotional expectations tethered to bomba's rhythms by not only examining the ways in which Afro-Puerto Ricans navigate these emotions daily, but by problematizing how colonialism informs bomberas' ontological positioning through its structuring of their world(s). The frequent fluctuation of emotions is mirrored by the genre's various rhythms and movements that correspond with them, enabling what I have come to understand as *emotional dexterity*. This dexterity is how bomberas negotiate the ways that colonialism renders them in a perpetual state of duress.

I join my colloquial understanding of emotional dexterity within bomba with Lauren Berlant's scaffolding of affect using literary genres as an analytic in *Cruel Optimism* (2011). Berlant uses aesthetic forms to point towards evidence of historical processes over time. Thus,

[22] The rhythms that are bolded are considered the most popular, or core rhythms, while the others could fall under the umbrella of these major rhythms. For more on categorization of bomba rhythms, see Barton (1996).

genres in their structures, content, and interaction with the audience become archives within their own right. In my own project, bomba is the archival genre and its many rhythms are forms that mirror historical processes of how Afro-Puerto Ricans survived. However, Berlant suggests " a distinction between a structure of affect and what we call affect when we encounter it" (2011, 158). It is this distinction of encounter that separates my joining the project of affective archives from my intervention of emotional dexterity. Upon encountering or reacting to structures of affect, an embodied response takes place. Such a response must be flexible and sturdy enough to navigate the impacts of affective ideologies that are put into place, especially when those individuals in question are colonial subjects.

In my compilation of an affective archive and illustration of an embodied emotional dexterity, I generate an understanding of the daily lives of Afro-Puerto Rican women and concretize an historiographical trajectory of how they have come to understand a world that continues to silence them by erasure in academic texts, minimize their roles by way of misogynoir, and deem them disposable through the continued physical violence that follows them throughout history up until the present day, which I discuss at length in Chapter Three.

Resiste si puedes: doing nonlinear time[23]

I first saw Ninoshka at a monthly bombazo put on by Taller Tambuye for students in September 2019. The bombazo is a part of a larger monthly community festival to bring attention to the richness of Rio Piedras in Puerto Rico, due to the popular misconception that, aside from the University of Puerto Rico campus in the area, it is a "bad neighborhood." In fact, during my undergraduate career in a Puerto Rican history course, the professor referred to the area as "the

[23] This section title is based off of a bomba group in Puerto Rico named *La Resistencia* and they oftentimes begin their sets with a short trademark song where they tell the audience "resiste si puedes" meaning resist dancing or participating if you can, implying that eventually they will be worn down or moved to participate.

ghetto." My grandparents live 15 minutes from Taller Tambuye. I remember feeling offended when hearing that in a lecture, and during my time in Puerto Rico I never thought of Rio Piedras as too different from how the southside of Chicago is discussed and depicted in popular media: by criminalizing the entire area and emphasizing the instances of gun violence without addressing the structural violences that prompt and perpetuate interpersonal acts of violence[24]. In fact, three of the regular places I went to to see bombazos were in Rio Piedras. While there are drug users and pandlers on the street that aggressively suggest you pay them to "watch" your car as it's parked, I didn't think too much into it. But the block party was an intentional way of strengthening the ties between community members and businesses, and attempting to address the ways the campus was bringing an influx of students from outside the neighborhood, slowly gentrifying the area.

I remember walking anxiously from my car to the dance studio, not wanting to get lost again since getting lost was a daily occurrence since moving to Puerto Rico. I wasn't sure if the bombazo would be by the dance building, but I thought that would be a great place to start. As I walked up on the dance studio, I saw *Tambuyeros* (students affiliated with the school) outside laughing. Some had *medalla*,[25] while others were lugging around barriles to use the opportunity to practice outside of class. I saw a friend from class and another person who I met during the Bomba Research Conference earlier that summer.[26] I joined their walking group as they crossed a couple streets to an open space on a corner of the neighborhood where Tambuye was playing and beginning their set. I recognized many people from my class, as well as people who I'd seen in the building going to and from their own classes.

[24] For more on how residential areas are structured as racialized places of belonging see Zaire Dinzey-Flores (2014). Also for another ethnographic perspective of bomba in the area of Rio Piedras see Barbara Abadía Rexach (2012).
[25] Medalla is an award-winning light beer exclusive to Puerto Rico and a local favorite.
[26] For more on the Bomba Research Conference see Chapters 2 and 4.

The sun was beginning to set. It was still over 80 degrees with probably 50 percent humidity or more, but people continued to arrive. It wasn't just young adults or college aged students who were taking dance classes that were joining the bombazo and batey circle, there were kids and teenagers coming, too. I vividly remember a little girl, whose dad was drumming, being so excited to dance and being the first one to enter the batey of the night. Then, there was also a young girl who ran out of a minivan and straight behind a microphone to join the *coro* (chorus). And as the rhythm began changing from a sicá to a *yubá*, she took the lead and began:

"Maldita tú boca que me mentía,

maldita tú boca que me mentía,

maldita tú boca y tú cobardía,

maldita mi boca si te vuelvo a besar"

(I curse your mouth that lied to me

I curse your mouth that lied to me

I curse your mouth and cowardice

I curse my mouth if I kiss you again)

There was a moment of shock and amusement as this young girl sang this song, which could be somewhat scandalous, with so much enthusiasm[27]. But then, I saw a woman get ready to enter the batey. She handed her friends her phone and readied her *pañuelo* to *piquetear*.

This song detailed an infuriating heartbreak, and somehow, I saw Ninoshka as someone who could relate as she bent her knees and started her paseo into the batey. Without a skirt, her feet and posture were exposed, rendering her impeccable technique apparent, and I knew from

[27] The word "maldita" could be also understood as a curse word and while it does translate to "curse," it can be akin to the f-word.

how Marién smiled as she played the primo that she was a longtime student. Her time in the batey is still etched into my memory as one of my favorite *pasos*—her footwork and command of time still blows me away when I watch the videos. At 5'3", Ninoshka has been a student of Marién for 15 years and has been dancing bomba since even before Marién began her school. With a voice you could listen to all day, she remarked about how yubá used to be a rhythm that she was intimidated by at first because of the ways the rhythm could bring out emotions you'd rather not deal with or be vulnerable to in public. But, if you would have seen her that night, you would have never guessed that.

Like many of the other bomberas that I spent time with and to whom I am indebted for this project, Ninoshka highlighted the different emotional expectations that each rhythm in the genre held. But, during our interview she shared something that shifted my understanding of dance and coloniality but also concretizes how I position bomberas as colonial subjects of an American empire and not just dancers, but women who are using dance because it has become a vessel that holds the stories that their ancestors left behind.

> "Por eso es que la conexión que yo tengo con la bomba es única y es especial. Porque la bomba no solamente es alegre, depende al ritmo– hay ritmos que son alegres como hay ritmos de lamentos y enojo y furia que esos son bien profundos. Lo que es el yubá, por ejemplo, el cuembé no tanto porque el cuembé es suave, es un ritmo de bomba que suave pero tu lo puedes incrementar para hacerlo más rápido. Y el yubá significa muchos sentimientos: tristeza, enojo, rabia. Y hay otro ritmo que se llama… deja ver si me acuerdo tengo el nombre en el punto de la lengua… [se recuérde despues] Es corve, lo he bailado muchas veces y lo describo como fuerte, cargado, y tienes que hacerlo con furia y enojo porque eso es lo que representa. Tienes que tener una resistencia bastante fuerte para poder

realizar una coreografía en ese tipo de ritmo...es bastante la resistencia que tienes que tener, es mucha. “ - Ninoshka 2020

(It's because the connection that I have with bomba is personal (unique) and special. Because bomba isn’t just joy, it depends on the rhythm—there are rhythms that are joyful just like there are rhythms of lament and anger and rage that are very profound. That is what makes yubá, but for example the [rhythm] cuembé not so much, because cuembé is smooth, it's a bomba rhythm that is soft but you could also speed it up to be faster. And yubá, it's a lot of different feelings: sadness, anger, and rage. There is another that's named... let me see if I can remember it … it's on the tip of my tongue… [she remembers later]. Corve, I have danced it several times and I would describe it like strong, heart, and you have to be furious or angry when you dance it because that's what it represents. You have to have a great deal of endurance to be able to do that type of choreography . You have to have an immense amount of endurance , it's a lot”)

Having lived in Chicago my whole life but having grown up in a Puerto Rican Pentecostal Church and majored in Spanish Literature in undergrad, I didn’t anticipate there being a whole lot of words that I did not recognize. For the most part, that assumption stood true, but in the moments where I was surprised or taken aback by the actual contextualized significance of a word or of a word’s many meanings, I made sure to elucidate it, or as Sara Ahmed would say, “bring feminist theory home with me.” “Mayores” was one of those *utterances.* Afro-Puerto Rican anthropologist Hilda Lloréns urges that “researchers should explore the discarded and overlooked areas manifested in the subtleties… of utterance... as well as in the archive of people’s bodies and patchwork memory(ies). It is in these archives that the

stories of 'the people' are etched, stories too often missed or ignored by 'official' historical accounts" (2005). The taken for granted utterances of the everyday conversation reveal their significance once a researcher begins to create an assemblage or attempts to construct an analytic of their deployed praxis. These utterances can be situated within embodied practices or, as Lethabo King emphasizes, they are an "extratextual act" (2019, 63) within Black performance to critique the violence of colonialism. *Black Latinx Dexterity* is rooted in performance and the generative space poetics and aesthetics offer for one to think through decoloniality. However, under the notion of everyday unspectacular performance, there are also clarifying utterances. I use Lethabo King's extratextual and Lloren's heed of utterance as a point of departure into the body and thinking through the work that the body does, or what I call sweaty conceptualizations[28]. Embodied sensations of realizing that typical translations or cognates from English to Spanish were disjointed and distanced from their everyday contextualizations were moments I fleshed out in my writing process.

Mayores, for example, was a word I had grown up singing or hearing, but it wasn't until hearing it in bomba class that it really took off. Growing up in church, I had always used *viejitos* or elders or *hermana* as an honorific for elder members that were to be respected. Hearing mayor as elder was an embodied moment, one where the realization of an utterance (like that referenced by Lloréns) or an everyday articulation of identity was heard not only through my ear but also realized in my mind. It was one that mattered and led to ethnographic moments as demonstrated within the confines of this written project. It can mean better, as in *soy mayor que usted* ("I am better than you") or like *mis hermanas mayores* ("my older sisters"). While it does not always

[28] Lethabo King (2019) positions the extratextual as adjacent to her discourse of untranslatability as an instance of Black revolt, the example she uses refers to protest graffiti. In my own project, I look at embodied knowledge which requires the extratextual to be analyzed not only from a spectator lens but also through a reflexive one, as denoted by "sweaty conceptualization."

mean older as a connotation of age, it does signal seniority and wisdom. In bomba, being a mayor means that your opinion matters, that you have been under someone's tutelage, and that you know how certain movements are executed. More than that, you are a preserver of bomba whether you are in a formal teaching position or not.

Ninoshka's excerpt brings about another utterance, another embodied realization of contextualization being everything, another click. When discussing the rhythms of bomba, she can't seem to remember the name of one[29]. She just says that it requires and required her to build up a *resistencia.* Resistencia and resistance are cognates, meaning they have a common etymological origin, and they likely mean the same or similar things. Like most times it is used in English, in Spanish resistencia means to resist, however, it can also refer to endurance. So, when an Afro-Puerto Rican woman uses resistencia to mean endurance in an interview with me, another Afro-Puerto Rican woman, of course I begin to think through the ramifications of what that means within discourses of coloniality. What if resistance is how colonial subjects endure? Does that mean our survival or ability to endure is predicated upon such a resistance? Ninoshka was referring to building up her endurance and so I ask, "What is Afro-Puerto Rican endurance built from?"

The discussion of endurance is one that has been taken up by many scholars invested in the ways that colonized peoples are able to continue to find the stamina to survive and leave legacies that later generations continue to make beautiful. Most recently, Sandra Ruiz (2019) elucidated in her performance studies analysis *Ricanness*, that endurance is a marker of what constructs a Puerto Rican ontology. She argues that at any point in linear time, one ontological characteristic that remains fixed amongst Puerto Ricans is that they are colonial subjects,

[29] She later remembers it is corve. A yubá type rhythm from Loiza, Puerto Rico.

whether it be neocolonial or postcolonial. “Ricanness is the ultimate testament to this colonial non departure” (Ruiz 2019, 4). The process of colonization in Puerto Rico is “a project in a temporal looping,” and what concerns her is how Puerto Ricans are “doing time.”

Another notable scholar who underscores the ways in which time functions as an agent of imperialism is Ann Stoler. Time, following Stoler’s framework (2013), weakens the colony’s prospects of sovereignty and further necessitates the need for the metropole’s intervention. Her theoretical inquiry looks at how imperial projects are propelled by the constant process of ruining or ruination. In another work, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times,* Stoler is also taking up the ways the most vulnerable people, those who have endured numerous violent acts and institutional gaslighting, become durable (2016). Duress, Stoler argues, is the state of colonized peoples. One of the definitions of “duress” is to be forcibly coerced or restrained against your will. A synonym of duress is “imprisoned.” Ruiz’ particular emphasis on Puerto Rico’s state of coloniality is marked by its status as a colony that became what is a modern version of a colony, rendering it as a colony in perpetuity and since inception. Ruiz uses the phrase “doing time*”* to not only unravel the ideas of Puerto Rican subjectivity as one of marginalization under an imperial regime, but also to liken the ways time works tethered to subjects. Most explicitly she uses “doing time” to reframe towards how incarcerated people have expressed how time works within prison[30].

Doing time means you are chipping away at the clock until your sentence is up, immersing yourself in routine to make the time pass quicker, or as Piper Kerman said in her memoir *Orange*

[30] This is not to confuse the violences suffered by colonial subjects with that of incarcerated peoples. While the violent structures driven by capitalism and white supremacy propel and uphold mass incarceration and colonialism, incarcerated peoples must endure more than neglect from a metropole as they are thrown into solitary confinement and are separated from their families and under close surveillance rendering them without autonomy.

is the New Black (2010),

> *"*I had learned to hasten the days by chasing the enjoyment in them, no matter how elusive. Some people on the outside look for what is amiss in every interaction, every relationship, and every meal; they are always trying to hang their mortality on improvement. It was incredibly liberating to instead tackle the trick of making each day fly more quickly. "Time, be my friend," I repeated every day."

If colonialism uses time as its engine to reinvigorate its mission of domination, colonial subjects—or Puerto Ricans—must find or create spaces amidst the metronome of violence for enjoyment as days, decades, or centuries pass. The trick of amicable time put forth by Kerman becomes even more complex when taking into account the varied emotions of the human experience. This is particularly true for Afro-Puerto Ricans who are not only colonial subjects but also are impacted by structural and interpersonal antiblackness. For me and the other bomberas I have spent time with and interviewed during my field research, like Ninoshka, bomba and the batey are techniques of making time amicable, of making life in the wake of consistent weathering and a string of various disasters more bearable[31]. While Stoler asserts that "imperial debris also calls forth the endurance that duress demands..." (2016, 336), Ninoshka said that she had to engage in physical activity in order to build up her endurance to perform to the rhythm of *corvé*, rendering the batey and bomba as a space that not only is a space and act of enjoyment but is *porous* enough to mirror their experiences that might not be qualified as pleasurable[32].

[31] The reference to weathering is to Christina Sharpe (2016) where she makes the claim that like acid rain that denigrates sediment white supremacy is becoming an environmental condition that is affecting Black women's lives. Thus, the climate of antiblackness begins to weather or erode the life expectancy of Black women.

[32] Again, the corve is a loiceño yubá. Also, here I am using porous to gesture towards the theorization of "the Black

Bomba and its batey come to inscribe durability onto people, whereby endurance by colonial subjects under an inherently violent regime is resistance. In *Wicked Flesh*, Jessica Johnson (2020) intervenes with a mode of historicity soaked in care as she examines early Americanist scholarship of free and enslaved Black and women of color in colonial French territories that would become New Orleans. She asserts that "dexterous black women did what they could to disrupt the new demands that use and passion placed on their bodies," meaning that they did what they could to survive. While she is discussing an earlier time period than what my ethnographic field research is tackling, if we are to take seriously the emphasis Stoler and Ruiz put on constantly looping time as a mechanism of colonialism, then bomberas are still engaging in the very same type of emotional dexterity[33]. Furthermore, Johnson's theorization of "black femme freedom and geographies*"* underscores the ways that Black women created "intimate and kinship ties" through practices of freedom that emerged across the Atlantic and allowed them to "show up in defense of themselves and each other" (2020, 9-10). These practices of freedom resulted in Black femme geographies and required the embodied pleasure of taking up space with their bodies and wresting the resources to control their own lives (198). So, while the batey is complex enough to mirror the emotional dexterity of Afro-Puerto Rican women as displayed by bomba's rhythms, there is also an embodied inscription that takes place and is required in creating (spaces) of Black femme freedom. It is this bodily work that Ninoshka emphasizes in

---

pore" from *The Black Shoals* (2016), where the black pore is a space of possibility and permeability for Indigenous and Black peoples to co-create surviving practices to endure genocide and colonialism. I discuss Tiffany Lethabo King's work later in this chapter, but I see a more concrete analysis of Black geographies and Afro-Puerto Rican place-making alongside bomba in future iterations of this project.

[33] The French Caribbean and brand of colonialism is imperative to the rest of the Caribbean, particularly when discussing bomba and Afro-Puerto Rican epistemologies and ontologies due to the waves of migration of both French elites in the plantocracy and those who were now awarded their freedom as a result of Haitian revolution. Going further along this vein of thinking, while Puerto Rico continues to be placed alongside the hispanophone Caribbean, I believe that it would be even more generative to place Puerto Rico alongside New Orleans due to the similarities they share as being twice colonized, located within the American empire, and also have suffered immense neglect from the metropole in the wake of environmental catastrophe.

the task of strengthening her resistencia. It is the same bodily work my maestra required of me when learning to control my body while performing a cuembé. Then, with this understanding of Black femme freedom, it is not only the batey that becomes a part of the geographies of Black femme practices of freedom in the Afro-Atlantic world, but also the (inner) bodies of Black women as they emerge changed by shared intimacy and refusal in these physical spaces of freedom. It is these spaces of freedom, curated and preserved in the tradition of bomba, that allow for Afro-Puerto Rican women to endure colonialism.

Colonialism is an inherently violent project that has no foreseeable end. There is no point in which colonizers or (as Tiffany Lethabo King insists that we call agents of colonialism to remember how violence is inseparable from such a project) conquistadors decide, "This is enough"[34]. The end goal of conquistador-colonialism is complete subjugation and annihilation of a previous life. Under the guise of such a project, still living is dissent. Surviving or enduring becomes resistance, making Ninoshka's utterance and my framing of endurance all the more useful.

The poetics of refusal within bomba and the batey mirror the inner workings of an Afro-Puerto Rican endurance throughout and against a continual colonial project that relies on their fungibility and silencing. Bomba, as the oldest genre of music and dance in Puerto Rico, is an entry point towards understanding how the most vulnerable in a society energized to continue in the daily project of amicable time. Ren Ellis Neyra, in the *Cry of the Senses* (2021, 2),

[34] Lethabo King (2019) undertakes an immense task in analyzing various modes of colonialism, not just as a systemic inquiry of colonialism but also as a way of homing in on the ways colonialism within the Americas (particularly tethered to what is now the United States) succeeded in and creates fricative boundaries between Native Americans or Indigenous peoples and Black people. Colonialism uses violence to achieve its aims and continues to do so in the wake of its perverse successor (post)colonialism. Violence need not always be war, riots, and bloodshed; systemic violences is still violent and can work towards colonialisms ultimate aim of annihilation through slow death, mass incarceration, poverty, medical prejudice, and egregious resource distribution.

emphasizes poetics as a framework of besideness and partiality that underscores how one synesthetically cares about objects, subjects, and traditions in space and time. I lean into bomba as a space of freedom and a method towards understanding what endurance is "built from" in tension with the metronome of coloniality. Bomba has a different emotional expectation for each rhythm and that could very well have been my argument. Just as Ninoshka pointed out, that is valid and understudied in bomba scholarship. And it is my argument in part, but it is only a partial understanding of how, throughout history, bomberas have had to adjust and anticipate their lives in the wake of continual duress. But I use these various emotional expectations to understand how bodies and the people who live life in them maneuver through life and call upon similar sentiments outside of dance. I use the various rhythmic indicators as a roadmap in understanding how these affective circumstances or states exist beyond the batey and how a bombera's navigation or ability to perform within it strengthens their emotional dexterity. This emotional dexterity and ability to maneuver through various bomba rhythms while improvising and still showing restraint to respect the governing metrics of the batey mirror the ways Afro-Puerto Rican women mitigate their daily conditions as colonial subjects. I take seriously the ways in which the genre reflectively provides entry to both theorizing an inner corporealized knowledge, and a cartographic opportunity to map out the sensations that have been able to assist in Afro-Puerto Rican endurance. The batey is transformed by participants, but also transforms bomberxs, by its ability to act as a magical realistic portal to a greater understanding, to leave burdens, and to interact with ancestors.

Cuanto más vamos aguantar: The Physics of the batey and Navigating affective archives
(How much longer must we endure)

During the length of this project, I witnessed Puerto Rico be struck by hurricanes, political corruption, earthquakes, a gender violence rampage that prompted a state of emergency, and COVID-19. Each time, people were surrounded by community, and one way or another, bomba stitched them back strong throughout this string of catastrophes. Since the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Puerto Rico, and specifically those who would become the first Black Puerto Ricans on the archipelago, have been mitigating disasters as they built a life in the wake of slavery and the plantation. After the tragedy of Hurricane Maria in 2017 and its aftermath, public discourses surrounding Puerto Rico's political status or sovereignty became inseparable from that of natural disaster. However, as the all-women's bomba group *Ausuba* says in their song "Puerto Rico," *el colonialismo no es un desastre natural.* Historians who study the processes of colonialisms, as well as anthropologists who have studied disaster, have agreed that natural disasters are often environmental episodes exacerbated by poor government responses and political circumstances that leave communities structurally vulnerable. Thus, the burdened transition from an environmental episode to a natural disaster falls squarely on the governing entity. As Puerto Rican thinkers so eloquently detailed in *Aftershocks of Disaster* (2019), Hurricane Maria was a tremendous tragedy, not so much because of the hurricane but because of the administration's (lacking) response and halted relief efforts. The resounding groans of Maria are still sounding off within the archipelago and its diaspora as Puerto Rico still does not have full power. Puerto Rico was in a blackout state for six months due to neglect from the American Empire. During this time, lives were disrupted, families were grieving, and people were forever changed. In apparent throes of displacement and dispossession, Puerto Ricans throughout the imperial state empire were trying to (re)build community after Maria, similarly to those who fumbled towards making a life in the midst of tragedy and neglect after the Middle Passage,

further amplifying Ruiz' (2019) argument, and one of the central supporting tenets of this chapter: that Ricanness or (and especially Afro) Puerto Rican people exist under the constant structuring and cyclical rhythm of colonialism.

However, in the project of creating spaces of Black femme freedom and making time be (y)our friend, bomberxs lean into bomba's rhythms as way of providing subsistence in the daily and continual task of endurance. Caribbean dance scholar Yvonne Daniel (2011) suggests that dance became a way for Afro-Caribbean communities to (re)member themselves and their ancestors in their bodies, creating a communal body while navigating a disorienting and violent landscape. The act of (re)membering is a familiar practice within Afro-diasporic communities and traditions that allows for Black people to engage in the past, or the before that existed prior to colonialism, and still place themselves into that history as a means of constructing their own sense of identity. Michael Hanchard (1999), in *Afro-modernity: Temporality, politics, and the African Diaspora*, analyzes this phenomenon in relation to what he calls "racial time"[35]. A large part of how Afro-diasporic peoples discuss or partake in racial time is a byproduct of the consequences of the Western notion of modernity, which Hanchard (1999, 256) deems "a nightmare or utopia, horrible past or future present" pointing to a disjuncture in temporality. No doubt modernity and the Transatlantic Slave Trade are two sides of the same coin, both of which facilitated the creation of the human and of the *tabula rasa*, or erased slate, of a previous existence of Black peoples prior to conquistador-colonialism[36]. Bomba was prompted by the

[35] Hanchard defines racial time as the "inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups" (2011, 252). He articulates three various patterns that people partake due to this racial time and its disjuncture: 1) The effects of temporal ruptures result as waiting for goods or aid, 2) Time appropriation or using the construct of time and required labor in a stance for equity like with a boycott, 3) Ethico political relation between temporality and notions of human progress, this pattern is always concerned with the future or has religious undertones.

[36] For more details concerned with the construction of the human see Sylvia Wynter (2003). Also, Hanchard (1999) emphasizes *tabula rasa* or an erased slate when discussing Black people, in which the Transatlantic Slave Trade acts as the eraser and also deprives them of human time (or a past) or humanity.

need for, as Daniel (2011) put it, "(re)membering" a collective and collaborative communion to combat the colonial disarticulation of identity being spearheaded by the antiblackness and patriarchal violence since the slave trade. Bomba continues to be a tradition called upon in the present to endure colonialism. Where Hanchard (2020, 256) emphasizes "a horrible past or future present*"* in regard to Black peoples' deployment of racial time, Daniel more abstractly uses (re)membering which does not rely on a linear temporality that has been proven to not be relevant to Afro-diasporic peoples and practices. Yet, the batey and bomba participate in racialized time through the poetics of refusal or the refusal to be overcome by a linearity that does not aid in the project of amicable time. The tradition of bomba allows for the past, present, and future to exist beside each other.

The batey, undergirded by a nonlinear approach, also deviates from affixed spatial limitations. Perhaps that is the magical realistic element of bomba: the bombera's feeling of traveling outside of the governing rules of space and time to exist for a moment, surrounded by community and in community, wherever she wants[37]. I turn my attention to the ways that this feeling does not just magically happen, but rather how bomberxs are taught to prompt these nonlinear and aspatial experiences by their mayores. I have illustrated the ways that the batey becomes a vehicle of (re)building community for Puerto Ricans during the constant catastrophes they have been ontologically positioned to endure. Now, I point towards how the bomberas are changed by this interaction.

For example, in the wake of Hurricane Maria, one of the most recent catastrophes that pointed the globe's attention onto the archipelago, Puerto Rico went through six months of being powerless. I mean that in the most literal sense, although it is a clear mirroring of Puerto Rico's

[37] Magical realism is a notable hispanophone literary tradition. For examples on magical realism see the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

imperial neglect and fungibility as a colonial territory. During the blackout across Puerto Rico, people relied on generators, cash, and generosity to survive. One of the things that made time friendly to those in Puerto Rico, particularly in the Metro area, was the promise of Mondays at *Bonanza*[38]. At a bar in Santurce, the former territory of San Mateo de Cangrejos, people hoped.[39] Every Monday, bomberxs would gather drums and people to dance and sing bomba. This was clearly a survival tactic to provide refuge for those aching for some semblance of life before the storm, and it continues today with the same ache of imperial neglect. Meanwhile stateside, recently arrived Puerto Ricans (now the largest migration from the archipelago to the States) joined bomba performance ensembles, communities, and schools[40]. Indigo, one of the bomberas from the Bay Area in California who collaborated with me during my time in Puerto Rico, indicated that "After Maria, bomba had more fire." Just as bomba had always been, bomba became a public dexterous space where people could lament and be strengthened by the historical pattern of resilience that is embedded in the expressive cultural art form. The fire was fanned by subjects left in the ravaging flames of a globally witnessed neglect.

Lorena, another bombera that I took several semesters of bomba dance classes with, is someone who assisted in guaranteeing that this project came fruition. She joins many Puerto Ricans as someone who has lived in the archipelago as well as the diaspora. We talked many times before and after bomba, and even spent time together on the weekends going to bombazos and on other adventures. One day, she took me to her favorite café and, with her green-eyes and resounding laugh about my personal purse-sized Off! spray, she recounted her experiences with

[38] Bonanza, like many other bars in Puerto Rico, is an outdoor patio bar. Since the news coverage and widespread popularity amongst locals after hurricane Maria, huge crowds gather taking up the entire block every Monday.
[39] It is still referred to as such by those who refuse the ongoing gentrification and whitewashing of Puerto Rican history.
[40] As a direct response to Hurricane Maria, a bomba school was established in Orlando, Florida.

bomba in Puerto Rico and in the States. Before college, she had attended a folkloric day of culture curriculum workshops where she was introduced to bomba. It wasn't until she went to college in New York that she felt immersed in bomba. I asked her about how bomba was different, if at all, in the diaspora from how it was in Puerto Rico. Lorena recalled the off-looks or hesitation from other Puerto Ricans who only saw her pale skin. "I could tell people were like who is this white girl, but I missed home. *For people in the diaspora, bomba is like a plane ticket home*[41]." This statement further implicates the batey as a space that operates outside of linear or vertical time, but also outside of static place.

Other Black dance scholars have called the dance circle in Black traditions an area thick with energy, not only because of the ways Black dance has historically been regarded as a practice of resistance, but because the dance circle is predicated upon the involvement of other bodies to create a circle of participants (Browning 1995; Downey 2006; Maddox-Wingfield 2018; Camal 2019). Nubia, another Afro-Puerto Rican bombera, is a part of a family of musicians. Her early exposure and immersive coming of age within and in close proximity to bomba helped affim her sense of belonging despite being a visibly Afro-descendent woman. Despite facing immense misogynoir, Nubia's bomba training allowed her to grow confident and feel safe in a place and a history that has been and continues to be violent to women like her. She likens the batey and bomba to another interesting hispanophone literary tradition when she said *nos servimos un realismo mágico*, or "bomba and the batey is like our own magical realism."

The literary genre of magical realism suggests an undercurrent of fantasy within a realistic world frame. By using magical realism to explain her experience and the connection that she makes in the batey, she suggests that there is something about bomba that allows participants

[41] Emphasis my own.

to feel out of this world or time. Ethnographically, this became even more apparent when I began learning different piquetes for different regional styles or rhythms. In my more advanced classes and workshops, we were pushed to treat time as malleable within the batey. My mayores and figuras were training me to not only have the primo riff over the bass beat, but to be able to perform and propel the primo with my movements to have sounds that were *contratiempo* y *afuera de tiempo* that did not disrupt the flow or vibe of the batey. Contratiempo is against time, or the regular pattern of the song or rhythm, where accented movements live on the up beats instead of down beats, while afuera de tiempo are movements or phrases that layer over the base beat almost independently. A bombera must be able to navigate these various factors, the different styles, and connect with her primo during the 30 seconds to one minute and forty-five seconds she is in the batey.

Drawing on the fantastic that is magical realism, I lean even further into sci-fi. I argue that there is embodied Black femme freedom within the thick kinetic energy of the dance circle and within the practice of bomba, shared amongst practitioners and forming an energy that exists out of linear time. In *Physics of Blackness* (2015, 21), Michelle Wright attempts to articulate the problem of diaspora while also acknowledging the inability of finding a model of study that would be applicable to any geographic area during any historical period. Using quantum physics and black holes, Wright discusses the (im)possibilities of such a model existing. For Wright, astrophysics is a theoretical framework for describing the ways in which racial time and (re)membering sit in tension with one another through epiphenomenal time or moments that allow one to frame themselves in the present, but also beside the past and future. I am not suggesting I have a solid answer to the problems that Wright poses, but I am suggesting that Wright's theoretical framework is generative for understanding how bomba and the batey

become the locus of an affective archive. The batey is not tethered to any place or time, but it is anchored to the people making the batey, allowing it to (re)shape their interactions with memories or history. I join Wright's critique of linear temporality or vertical time-space and championing of horizontal approaches with Ruiz's (2019) insistence of a constant colonial temporal looping within a Rican aesthetic in order to center the batey and my understanding of the history of bomba and Puerto Rico, but most importantly how people came to experience life and their experience living it.

In joining the temporal framings of Ruiz (2019) and Wright (2015), who urge scholars to carve out a departure from all concepts of linearity, and in studying colonized people with the pedagogical analysis of my own mayores in bomba, there is a clarity in understanding that the batey operates outside of Western concepts of time. However, as highlighted, there is also an inscription or *conciencia,* or consciousness, that activates after the proper instruction and practice which propels practitioners to draw on an embodied knowledge that has been inscribed onto them by their teachers[42]. This bodily inscription is an embodied reaction of previous practitioners' interactions with various rhythms and circumstances which led to the genre's preservation and to endurance. The conciencia is the end result of a process that varies based on pedagogy and a bomberx's entry points to bomba. But, the consciousness, or the emotional dexterity as I describe it, is anchored in an embodied knowledge. One dancer, Halifu Osumare, described the total integration of mind, body, and spirit that results in the opening of your "inner cultural ear" (Shange 2020). I understand Osumare as describing the moment of a consciousness being realized or perhaps as earlier stated, a moment of embodied utterance. However, the inner or the embodied knowledge that welcomes outside stimuli to result in a dexterous consciousness

[42] For more on bomba con conciencia see Chapter 4.

has long been within the gaze of women of color thinkers.

The most vulnerable subjects in the world's oldest colony continue to center themselves after times of great catastrophe using bomba. The dance circle is not only where current practitioners dance and are seen, but it holds the legacies of those who came and who will come after memorialized in songs, figuras, and the memories of those who remember. As discussed, bomba's centering of elders is demanded by its oral traditions and also by the embodied knowledge elders possess and inscribe on their students[43]. This transcription of knowledge and experience is made apparent in the batey. While bomba has been considered to be on the social end of the Caribbean social/sacred continuum by dance anthropologist Yvonne Daniel (2011), its stable and consistent position as a (re)memory-making pedagogical practice suggests an embodied epistemic. Bomba, as an historically entangled practice, alongside the ways that Black dance prompts the ability to incarnate the past, reveals sacred potential[44]. Ashley Coleman Taylor (2019) interrogates bomba's spiritual connections through her analytic of the oceanic as a deep spiritual and metaphysical embodied archive which is accessed through Afro-diasporic practices. Bomberas' experiences are positioned within the tradition alongside other diasporic practices of spirituality, healing, and ancestral reverence. Taylor's emphasis on the archival oceanic connects a practitioner's body to a body of memory or the memory of the Middle Passage that framed the Atlantic world as we have come to understand it. There is a sacred veneration occurring in the batey. However, I am emphasizing the embodied memory of bomberxs, memory-making practices, and history, or (re)membering.

The bodily memory and rhythmic patterns within bomba's batey work together to prompt

[43] See Chapter 2 and 4
[44] Yvonne Daniels (2011, 75, 130)

the repertoire of, in my case, bomberas[45]. The vibrations of the *burleadors* and the *subidor* work together with the figuras made by a bombera to enable the sonic experience that has endured through history. Ashon Crawely (2017) describes the sonic as "announcing the fact of ongoing vibration, some felt, some heard, always, however, moving, always abounding, always there". Crawley uses this understanding of sonic to frame Black sound, particularly within Black Pentecostalism. Not only is the sound at play in propelling the potential of the batey within the tradition of bomba, but so are the embodied knowledge and experiences. Anthropologist Aisha Beliso-de Jesus focuses on ritual in the Afro-diasporic religion of Santeria. In *Electric Santeria* (2015), Beliso-de Jesus theorizes "copresence" as a embodied racial-ethno historical matrix anchored in Afro-diasporic religion which prompts scholars invested in embodiment to consider how different bodies have different capacities for various spiritual or inner experiences[46]. In the genre of bomba, it is both the sonic and the ritual of the batey that serves as a nexus of spiritual possibility. It is this spiritual possibility that I aim to lean into and further understand through emotional dexterity and affective archives.

I turn ideas about the spiritual connection in bomba inward. The erotic provides the destination for my intellectual journey into what Nadia Ellis calls the "territory of the soul," which "are those spaces that embody the classic diaspora dialectic of being at once imagined and material" (2015, 3). Ellis argues that the territories of the soul are part and parcel of the diasporic practices to mitigate grief or loss. One would be remiss in a discussion of Afro-femme embodied epistemologies to side-step Audre Lorde and the erotic. The erotic, "is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual place, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed

[45] See Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2006), I discuss Taylor's theorizations in Chapters 2 and 4 as well.

[46]Beliso- de Jesus scaffolds her theoretical invention in the anthropologies of embodiment through complicating Pierre Bordieu's *habitus*. For more on this refer to the introduction.

or unrecognized feeling" (Lorde 1985, 87) that is amplified in communal practices. "The erotic functions in providing power from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" (Lorde 1985, 89). The erotic is the most respected and helpful theoretical framing for understanding the potential and origins of the embodied knowledge and experience at play within a bombera's life. I believe that it is a part of the reason why the batey holds the potential of an extended collective moment outside of time or space.

Bomba is the durable and dexterous genre that aids bomberas in the project of making amicable time. Just as the rhythms of bomba change, so does a person's emotion. However, the affective enduring cause or nebulous *things that happen*, that some theorists describe as affect, remain somewhat affixed[47]. Pivoting back to Ruiz's ontological positioning of Puerto Ricans as colonial subjects in perpetuity, colonialism and the ideologies that come with it have materialized into what I have come to understand as affective events. Berlant suggests that affective events are also reflective of one's education in attunement, in tracking repetition, form, and norm (2017, 158). In doing so, she suggests that an internal process of education is undertaken to process the encounter with affective forces, however, there is little done to understand what comprises such processes. Berlant emphasizes that "our viscera have been taught and are teachable if anything is" (2017, 159). My ethnographic study and compilation of bomba as an affective genre that allows for the plotting of historical processes within the trajectory of Puerto Rico, and in turn examines how Afro-Puerto Rican women have developed bodily responses and social practices that have inscribed emotional dexterity within and onto them that assists in their endurance.

Contemporary discourses of affect instigate a tension between affect and emotion. As

[47]As highlighted in the introduction, Kathleen Stewart (2007) describes affect as "the things that happen."

Sara Ahmed critiques (2004), "the affective turn" happening within anthropological discourse has been occurring for some time as women of color and queer scholars worked to interrogate how the personal and the political are felt through feelings of life. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions,* Ahmed (2004) exposes and condemns the academic association as emotions being "soft" or to an individual's detriment as she details the ways emotions are circulated through "affective economies". Ahmed not only emphasizes the importance of emotion or feelings, but also outlines how they burden structures upon which they are found, all the while providing the curvatures of our life.

> "Emotions tell us a lot about time; emotions are the very 'flesh' of time. They show us the time it takes to move, or to move on, is a time that exceeds the time of an individual life. Through emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies. Emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are non-consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery, and violence shape lives and worlds in the present" (2004, 202).

Emotions and time are interlinked. They are "the very flesh of time" due to the ways that feelings are felt through lived experiences. Though Ahmed lays out the ways emotions are integral and rigorously intertwined with the movements of time, lives, and cause and effect, she does not elucidate in certainty what affect is. She does use affective economies, pointing towards the enduring infrastructural qualities of affect. Shaka McGlotten, in *Virtual Intimacies* (2013), then uses affect(ive) in their inquiries about the functionality of intimacies amongst queer virtual interactions and their links from affect to ideology. In doing so, McGlotten joins Berlant by emphasizing the ways that affect undergirds social life, or rather that affect, like ideologies, are structural. The distinction between the emotions and affect becomes incredibly important, particularly within my own project as I not only make use of bomba as a historicizing agent of

embodied feeling in Puerto Rico, but also of how colonialism structures feeling as well as bomberxs' everyday lives.

The durability and endurance that make up the ontological positioning of Afro-Puerto Rican women also positions them as an ontological paradox to the project that is colonialism. Much like traveling for Black American women as Bianca Williams describes in *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2018), bomba becomes a practice of emotional labor that inscribes durability onto Puerto Rican women. For example, as they confront a statewide emergency of gender violence in Puerto Rico, bomberas are affirmed by cuembé and seis corridos to be objects of desire but retain their autonomy to feel affirmed in their own bodies and in sensuality or use a yubá to pay reverence to the women who have died and will continue to die as the state ignores Puerto Rican women[48]. Meanwhile, the consistent disposability faced by women on a structural and interpersonal level might call a woman to release her pain in a yubá like Ninoshka, or to imagine and (re)member the strength of their ancestors who came before. The affectivity and emotional dexterity pinned within bomba encompass the power of bomba and bomberas. They allow scholars to think through how antiblackness and patriarchal violence are part and parcel of the totalizing colonial project. Through bomba and its instruction, I argue that this embodied emotional dexterity propels Afro-Puerto Rican women to navigate the various dispositions contained within an affective archive throughout history and work against colonial time and its reverberations of neglect, violence, and obscurity.

[48] See Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

"*Yo la bomba no la bailé, la bomba yo la vivé*" (I didn't just dance bomba, I lived it):

The Pedagogy of Daily Puerto Rican Life, Black Feminist Praxis, and the Batey[49]

*"*She won't remember the routine wreckage she used to walk through barefoot here. She sands it out*" (Gumbs 2016, 27).*

I came to Puerto Rico to study the role of *bomba* amongst (Afro)Puerto Rican women in the wake of Hurricane Maria. At the start of my time in the field the historic protests that would result in the ousting of the former Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló happened. Then, a state of alertness was issued due to the high rates of gender-based violence happening across the island. Then, the earthquakes along Puerto Rico's southern coast continued to cause anxiety in a society that remembers the trauma of Hurricane Maria now more than ever. Finally, as COVID-19 changes how people come together and sustain culturally relevant practices across the world, *bomberxs* are navigating how the *batey* spreads across oceans and in the age of social distancing. Through it all, I have seen *figuras* remaining constant in ensuring that the batey continues to remain a sacred ground rich with memory and creativity for bomberxs, despite how it adjusts to the constant chaos and catastrophe that seems to have followed Puerto Rico since the conquistadors arrived. Figuras are political actors whose embodies historical legacies could be acted out through the ways in which they continue to live in the inheritance of Black femme

[49] *Yo la bomba no la baile is a song* (lyric) from the *bomba* group, Colectivo Umoja. I have also done this with each section found in this essay. This is an excerpt of a chapter to abide by the set writing sample guidelines.

freedom and care not only for one another on an intimate level but extending their care on an infrastructural level to correct even governmental agencies. Figuras are not only movements within the dance circle or batey but also bomberas.

With the intention of welding Puerto Rico to practices of blackness within a Black Studies discourse, I offer figuras to mediate through current tensions happening in contemporary discourse. Through Melanie and Julie, I emphasize how bomba attends to individual and infrastructural recovery. More specifically, what is the difference between healing and reparations*?* What are the stakes under each? Then, through Ivelisse and Alyssa and again, Julie, I account for the ways diasporic Ricans who practice bomba reinvigorate their dispersed or displaced condition to circumvent "official" relief systems and provide aid to those in need. How does bomba become a balm for destierro and also a salve for imperial neglect? All of the figuras in this chapter illustrate intimate and laborious care-work, but Marién most clearly and effectively illustrates how correction is a labor of love given by figuras on an interpersonal and infrastructural level. How does dance, and specifically bomba, offer academics the necessary framework to think through violence, harm, and healing, not only on a theoretical level, but following a Black Feminist practical application to rectify the deficiencies that are noted.[50]

I met Melanie by a very popular *quiosco*[51] called *El Boricua* in *Piñones*. We discussed my interest in bomba and my graduate program over plantain fritters and beer. She told me about her own time in a graduate program. Her eyes saw past my anxiety and shone with the passion she lives her life with. Her curly hair blew in the sea breeze as we walked to *El Áncon*, where the

[50] I am distinguishing between violence and harm using the rationale that violence is the act and harm is the residual impact of the actions. In other words, "violence" might describe policy and then "harm" might describe the impact of living under determined conditions.

[51] A kiosk stand.

bombazo would be taking place. She was excited that someone else was taking up scholarly interest in bomberas, past and present. But more than anything Melanie felt familiar. It wasn't until I was the first volunteer for the acupuncture therapy on the side of the road, when I said, "this is my first time g," that she confirmed she was also a Chi Rican, or a Puerto Rican from Chicago. It was one of several moments we shared on that very long and impactful day that cemented our sistership. Loiza's bombazo was beautiful. People of all ages came out and participated in watching the *Capoeira Angola*, and dancing and singing in the bombazo. Afterward, Melanie invited me to another *baile de bomba (*a birthday party)[52]. I was enthusiastically down to go. She even offered to drive me to my grandparent's house so I could change and go with her. She made sure I was safe and comfortable that whole night, introducing me to someone who would become one of my bomba instructors during field research, and to just about everyone else who would participate in my project. She wasn't even annoyed with my grandmother, when she called me to return home.

Melanie has never stopped being kind and vouching for me. My mom once described Melanie as someone who covers me, meaning her reputation is an umbrella that cloaks me in a type of social protection. People treat me kindly by association off the strength and respect Melanie's work. She has spent years organizing the community-focused and accessible National Bomba Research Conference, engaging both academic and public spaces with her works on women in bomba, and working for for the preservation and elevation of Puerto Rican Performing Arts through her organization PROPA (Puerto Rican Organization of Performing Arts). I have helped Melanie in service projects restoring long forgotten bateyes or places that hold significance in bomba's history. I have seen her forgo what might seem like "official"

[52] *Baile de bomba* is another phrase for *bombazo*. In fact, *baile de bomba* is what *bombazos* were originally called due to the fact that the term "bombazo" originated in the 90s.

preservation of Black Puerto Rican historical places because she understands that official preservation can only happen in tandem with and accessible to those whose ancestors and elders once frequented those places. Melanie continues to be an example of how bomba work is all about and for the community. Having been trained as a performance studies scholar, Melanie understands academic pressure and challenges but does the work without regard for an authoritative institution that is not accountable to the voices they publish. For Melanie, the authoritative institution she answers to are the ancestors and those around her. For me, Melanie and the other women I introduce in this essay have gone above and beyond to make sure I do not stumble as they did, to make sure that the path they leave for others to follow, as the epigraph states, is sanded out.

These figuras use bomba as a tool to organize, provide support, and advocate through every single situation. They make sure that the next generation of bomberxs are equipped to do the same. The care Melanie extended to me mirrors the care she extended on a larger scale around post-Maria Puerto Rico. She brought supplies to various communities herself, since she did not trust government entities to provide resources for or care about Puerto Ricans. The perpetual state of negligence that Puerto Ricans were left in resulted in many figuras, like Melanie, being disenchanted with government aid. Instead, they turned to mutual aid and strengthened their abilities to be self-reliant as Puerto Ricans across the empire. In this way, bomba is revealed as a healing practice and a technology of provision on a larger scale. The figuras deploy bomba and their network of bomberxs in the States and in the archipelago as agents of self-reliant refusal (Reese 2019). In terms of caring for their communities, on some level, figuras are not interested in resisting government aid, rather they are opting out of dependence on the state for care and relying on their kin-like networks of care instead.

In this section, I introduce you to my figuras. Throughout my writing process I lean heavily into Kirin Narayan's *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov* (2012) and I use figuras as a semiotic hermeneutic to sift through what bomba, bomberas' lives, and original epistemologies means across phenomenological and ontological contexts. I chose what Narayan describes as "moments of doubling*,"* where people are both human and nonhuman (2012, 61) to show the person but also to elucidate how I fashioned figuras theoretically. To do so in the most concise and clear way, my portraits of my figuras show how feminine embodied knowledge is taught in a way that (re)inscribes itself onto the next generation of bomberas. It is these figuras that give an applied example of how an affective archive is curated through critical mentorship and intentional memory-making practices. In this chapter, figuras demonstrate how their emotional dexterity is prompted by a need to survive under colonial duress. This dexterity is what animates a bombera's *resistencia* to not only endure but also to leverage themselves as to change the society around them.

In this way, bomberas are calling upon and adding to their embodied affective archives to recall how they have been taught through movements, both physical and social, to be self-reliant. At the same time, figuras are also attending to their present-day trials by "confronting the oppression they are [were] facing" (Reese 2019, 9). Figuras are well aware of how colonialism and antiblackness has relegated their social positioning. I describe the ways in which their identity politics aligns with that of the Combahee River Collective, such that their work (whether postured towards dance or towards social justice) is not just about who they are but also how they can confront the oppressive forces that they encounter daily[53]. Even more so, bomberas

[53] In efforts to illustrate that I am not superficially using Black feminism as an analytic placeholder I recall one of the Combahee River Collective's main priorities, which was to end forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women. In this way, Puerto Rico has always been included in Black Feminism and realized as one of the many parts of the Black experience.

cement their importance within bomba through their intentional doing and intergenerational interactions within the community as I show here. Figuras, which they present and pass down and exist as, are most certainly a type of feminine inheritance or intimate care taking.

Figuras are not only movements within the dance circle or batey but also bomberas. Thus, whether analyzing physical gestures or knowledge holders within the tradition, figuras are the result of embodied knowledge production. They are the recall of generations of bomberas passing down both the ways that they danced around their marginal positions and confronted the structural limitations placed on them as racialized colonial citizens.

Aimee Cox argues that embodied knowledge, of Black girls specifically, "allows them to feel powerful and in control or degraded and unprotected can in many cases, provide the information that keeps them alive" (2015, 94). What I find important to highlight is the argument Cox makes about how an individual's body collects information based on their life experience, and that of those around them. To that end, just as Cox emphasizes familial ties, who an individual learns from also adjusts the ways their body not only carries knowledge but also how they draw on that information. In *Shapeshifters*, Cox homes in on embodied ways of knowing in ways that are integral to my own theoretical and methodological approaches. Specifically, she brings attention to "sense memories," She writes that "the felt and physically embedded stores of knowledge are frequently what Black girls employ so that they can return their bodies to themselves as evidence to deny their vagueness or failure" (2015, 194). I use the sense memories of bomba's rhythms and lessons from figuras inside and outside of the batey to contribute to the project of an affective archive.

Affective archives within the Caribbean become one of the most accessible and reliant bodies of knowledge due to colonialism. Deborah Thomas, Caribbean anthropologist, poses the

logic that "if archives of affect are produced in and through particular sociopolitical affective fields, then they also generate particular technologies through which we experience, confront, and interpret these fields" (2019, 20). Bomba and the batey, then, become produced by colonialism, while simultaneously confronting it. The batey is both how we remember and how we reimagine and re-encounter these women. Figuras in the batey, then, are how bomberas want to be remembered and their physical act of remembering. Figuras outside of the batey are the bomberas who make sure the batey is remembered and cared for no matter how expansive the batey becomes. I use Black Feminist discourse to think through how the emotional labor of teaching dance and organizing bateyes lends itself to social movements, some of which led to the ousting of Puerto Rico's ex-governor in 2019. While I use Black theory to anchor my mediations, I also intersect Black theory with my ethnographic data to show how bomba offers structural, as well as personal contributions to discussions on reparations and repair.

The women I highlight in this manuscript are not minor figures. In the center of the action, the dancing, the music, the audience, the drummers—the batey—there are no minor figures. In the batey there are only figuras. The people making up the *corillo*[54] ultimately take center stage in the batey at one point or another. The figuras that a dancer brings forth is a testimony of who taught them and whoever taught their teachers, and what they wanted to show in that moment. But, the figuras or bomberas I focus on follow and cement bomba's tradition of making sure the corillo is an extension of what takes place in the center. They teach classes making sure everyone is sure-footed, always asking "hay dudas corillo?*"* or "are there any doubts, gang?" More than that, they make sure that bomba communities across the Puerto Rican diaspora keep their eyes on the center of the batey and see past the chaos: the drumming,

[54] The huddle, gang, or - for the purpose of this essay - the Hartmanian *chorus*.

dancing, and singing, the hurricanes, corruption, and earthquakes. The figuras make sure the corillo stays together and sees past that and supports and affirms one another whether that's calling out *"Habla*!*"* or sending life straws, water purification tablets, and nonperishable[55]s.

I use figuras to mediate the theoretical contributions of care as well as explicate the work this joint ethnographic and historical project conducts in and of bomba through an embodied grounding. Historical records offer only quick glimpses of bomberas. They have been described in wanted letters and accounts of encounters with runaway slaves by their scars, but they are more than their wounds. When taught the vocabulary of movements and gestures during a dancer's turn in the batey, the emphasis is on making sure the figuras are accurate and recognizable on the dancer's part. This is not only for aesthetic purposes, but also because, in executing the correct figuras, the dancer demonstrates their mastery of the art form and by proxy their *mayor's* status and ability to teach bomba the right way. I scaffold figuras from the ground up, theorizing with my interlocutors' pedagogical styles and curricula, but I also lean into Black Feminist historian Saidiya Hartman's contributions on the "chorus" and "minor figures"[56].

In her skillful attempt to blow the dust off of long forgotten women and center them as holistically as possible, Hartman inevitably points towards the irreconcilable histories of Black women never meant to be remembered.[57] In *Wayward Lives* Hartman does this by creating and elucidating "the minor figure" and "the chorus." "The chorus conjures the promise that this might never end, that there is no world but one, that everything is possible, that reservoir of life

[55] When a *bomberx* enters the *batey* to dance it is common to hear "*habla*" being called out to encourage them, or to complement a masterfully executed sequence. "Habla" translates to "talk" in English. Later, I further discuss why "habla" is incredibly appropriate affirmation that a dancer encounters due to the memory and care work being done in *bomba*.

[56] Here I am referencing both Faye Harrison (1991) and Barbara Christian (1988). These scholars, along with others, inform the ways in which I approach my theoretical cultivation and frameworks throughout this project.

[57] Here, I reference the exceedingly apparent and outright violence committed by archivists to count Black women's lives as inconsequential to the colonial record.

is limitless," she writes, "The bodies in motion, bodies intimate and proximate, recklessly assert what might be, how black folks *might could* live" (2019, 196-7). Hartman does not simply amalgamate the chorus as a bin to cast the irreconcilable. She instead constructs it in a way that shows the importance of the everyday and indistinguishable, or what accounts for most lives. A closer look at the chorus reveals the ways in which Black people have survived and lived.

Christina Sharpe wrote *In the Wake* (2016) to document how Black women across the globe spend so much of their lives living in the wake of the disaster of slavery and how, whether they realize it or not, they are living in the afterlife of slavery. In many regards, so do Puerto Ricans, regardless of Black descent. We live in the economic, ecological, and emotional aftermaths of slavery. Under her theoretical contributions, "wake work" demands not only the study of violence and harm done to Black colonized subjects, but also prompts an analysis of Black life in the wake of continuous death or attempts on it. It is a "praxis and mode of attending to Black life and suffering" (2016, 36) in a way that does not forget the past, nor is it anchored to the past. Recall its origins on sugar plantations in Puerto Rico and I lead you into transnational organizing and bomba networks spanning across Puerto Rico and the States.[58]

In this way figuras not only describe the historical positioning of bomberas, the physical movements and poses done within the batey, or the Puerto Rican women that are currently continuing to preserve and expand bomba in Puerto Rico and in the States. Figuras also call upon the feminine embodied knowledge of raced colonial women who have not only endured marginal roles in society but have contested them for their own peace and the betterment of the next

[58] Here I am thinking of specifically the *Red Cangrejero* or the Cangrejero Network. Bomba schools within that network are headed by a Cepeda family member and in light of COVID-19 students are allowed to participate in any of the schools' classes within the network. Similarly, there is a connection between Taller Tambuye in Rio Pierdras, Belele in Loiza, and La Escuelita Bombera de Corazon in Chicago—here the schools are headed by teachers who are all close friends and also tour together from time to time.

generation of bomberxs. Figuras harkens to intimate care taking and raising, or to mothering. It is very oppositional to that of mayores, who within bomba, tend to be men.

I make clear the connection of care work to the batey in bomba, and how that affective labor is what propels the batey to expand beyond a temporary dance circle into a web of mutual aid during catastrophic times in Puerto Rico. This care work is not only the dance but also the values ingrained within the practice. This lends itself to how bomba is not only a burgeoning network of practitioners that come together in the batey and to form bateyes, but also to how bomba is a healing tool. These women teach other women how to be affirmed and embrace an authority of power through their pedagogical approaches in teaching bomba because they themselves have been affirmed by it.

***El pueblo se esta quemando por falta de agua*: Care, Refusal, and Mutual Aid**

Ola Ola Ola / Ola de la mar/ el pueblo se esta quemando por falta de agua - Felix Alduen

(Wave, Wave, Wave/ Wave of the Ocean/ the village is burning due to the lack of water)

Puerto Rico's positioning as a colonial territory within the imperialistic regime is just a reiteration of the historical violence that the *conquistador-settler* prompted upon Spain's descent in the Caribbean. Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) emphasizes that the term "settler-colonialism," first coined by Haunani-Kay Trask (1999),[59] has now been contorted to focus on understanding and humanizing conquistadors as settlers—largely focusing on territorial acquisitions—instead

[59] Trask (1999) analyzes the political situation and placement of Hawaii within the US empire. She develops settler colonialism as analytic to precisely prescribe the state interaction and rights rendered by the territorial occupation and colonization of Hawaii by the US metropole. Since this intervention of mediating through the prescriptions and causations of marginalized citizenship within the US.

of the harm and violence being inflicted on human beings. The effects of colonialism are not just economical or spatially potent but are inflicted on and embodied by the bodies of people living in a colonized nation. The fissures of violence become more apparent during times of disaster like hurricanes or earthquakes, but they are inscribed in the everyday living of people via water quality, taxation, and unemployment rate. However, these figuras have been taught, believe, and teach that bomba can lend itself to the survival of the marginal in Puerto Rico and the States on an interpersonal level with infrastructural implications. Bomba's centering of healing and insistence on community reliance exhibits their strategies to live beyond the violence of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism that is anchored in history and stretches beyond shorelines into the States.

In "Gendering Diaspora," Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas (2008, 2) define "diaspora" as a "formation that is solely or primarily the result of migration" and an "expansive phenomenon that exceeds causal travel, movement or displacement." I use diaspora to reference the displacement of two groups of people in this project. The Black diaspora refers to the displacement of enslaved Africans as a result of the violent white supremacist regime that was carried out by what is more commonly known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Puerto Rican diaspora refers to that which was prompted by the US imperial project of citizen-making and acquiring migrant laborers which encouraged constant and continuous migration between the archipelago and the metropole. The constant motion that marks diaspora is reminiscent of how a bombazo is reliant upon all its elements. Energy is contained and transferred not by only the dancer, singer, audience member, or drummer, but it is exchanged and the bombazo is sustained by all of them. The Puerto Rican diaspora is not composed solely of migrations from the island, but also is shaped by those who practice return migrations or seasonal migrations creating a more

fluid relationship. A twenty-something year old Afro-Chi Rican, or a visibly Black Puerto Rican born and raised in the Puerto Rican diasporic community located in Chicago, was moved to lean into her communities both to help and heal. Alyssa, whose tight curly hair resembles my own, wanted to provide artistic relief to those impacted by the earthquakes. She works for nonprofits that focus on creative writing for youth, so this type of support is not outside of her realm of expertise. But even more important is her connection to bomba. She became a part of the bomba community by learning to dance and drum, and her passion for the art form is explicit in her discipline for the genre. Before the event to gather relief for those affected by the earthquakes, she visited me in Puerto Rico. She dropped into a bomba class with me, and I could see that she was intent on soaking up as much as she could during her time there. She was right next to me bearing the tightness in her quads as we continuously practiced the *paseo básico* of *cuembé*. Her event in Chicago included poetry performances and a bombazo. She said that bomba had to be present because inheritance attempts to provide mutual aid to Puerto Ricans made vulnerable by the earthquakes. Bomba is a call home for many *boricuas* in the diaspora. In the days leading up to her event, Alyssa realized that there might not be enough bomberxs present to successfully pull off what she envisioned. Many of the more seasoned drummers and singers would not be available, prompting her anxiety about the event. She was encouraged by her peers to assist in singing, although she had never done that before in a batey. Although she was nervous, Alyssa sounded beautiful, and the event was a success. Not too long after the event, Alyssa received a message from Ivelisse, her Chicago-based bomba teacher. Ivelisse was born in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, historically known for its Puerto Rican residents and specific Puerto Rican nationalist postures[60]. Ivelisse is a renowned bomba singer, arguably the most

[60] For more on the specific interlocking Chicago and Puerto Rican nationalist subject formations please see Ana Ramos-Zaya (2003) and Jonathan Rosa (2018).

famous, if not for her voice and being the main singer of two prominent bomba groups (*Bomba con Buya* and *Las Bompleneras*), then for her bomba school *La Escuelita Bombera de Corazon.* She dances, can be a *subidora*, and sings[61]. She has accomplished so much and is only in her early 30s. She is a figura and considered a mayor. Although, like most of the figuras in this paper, Ivelisse is mentioned throughout this dissertation, and I want to emphasize that age does not translate into being a mayor or figura. The respect an individual garners through their dedication to perfecting their craft and the craft of those around them does. I have taken classes with Ivelisse and documented performances of Ivelisse in Puerto Rico and it was Ivelisse and her group *Las Bompleneras* that prompted this project. All that to say, her voice is rich with the respect and care and love that she gives to others around her and that she undoubtedly receives from her practicing bomba.

Ivelisse took Alyssa out to lunch in Humboldt Park, they probably walked in between the two giant Puerto Rican flags that stand at the beginning and end of Division Street or *Paseo Boricua*. Over food, Alyssa disclosed in her interview that Ivelisse commended her on her successful event that without a doubt demonstrated her honest and noble intention. In a moment of intimate care work and cementing to doubters why Ivelisse is a figura, Alyssa relays another part of their conversation,

"She's [Ivelisse is] like 'Listen ma, this is great and you know you have so much potential and I can see the spirit but you're really falling before you crawl' … she's [Ivelisse is] like 'You have the desire to do it and the talent to do it but you need to take your time and return to the basics'…and [Now Alyssa speaking in the first person] I feel like you're right. I have no business going up there and cantando un cancion y no sabe la historia y no tengo ni uno idea de

[61] A *subidor* or *subidora* is another word for the principal drummer in *bomba,* similar to *primo.*

donde fue esa canción. I don't know where the fuck that song came from and where the content came from. And I'm like you [Ivelisse] right."

Through this example we see the same type of impactful and intimate corrective labor and care that marks the important work and ontological position of figuras in the bomba community not only in Puerto Rico, but also in its diaspora. More than that, we see how figuras, through life experiences, training, and listening to their mayores and other figuras, have acquired knowledge and historical authority that is not documented in traditional texts on bomba. They are passed down to and by figuras through the oral tradition and embodied (re)inscription of bodily knowledge and practices within the tradition of bomba. For example, we also see how a bombera must also be *humildad* or humble to receive correction. Such a humbleness not only aids in bettering their performance or skill but also illustrates their dedication to bomba outside of a traditional dance class setting. Ivelisse is one of the three bomba instructors that I have worked with throughout this project. I cannot count how many times she has emphasized that bomba is not a "hit it or quit it" type of activity[62]. She emphasizes that bomba is not something contained to a classroom, but a lifelong practice. Ivelisse exemplifies what anthropologist Ashanté Reese defines as a "Black Feminist Praxis," "it is then we bring our whole selves, with all the emotional and physical experiences that our fields may not have prepared us for, that we do the messy, hard work of getting free" (2019, 136). The figuras might have started in bomba to dance or sing but bomba is more than just dancing or singing, it is a lifestyle. Figuras are defined through the bodily movements and embodied epistemologies demonstrated in the batey, but they are also defined through uncomfortable conversations and correction always *con cariño* or with

[62] Ivelisse's referencing is to how people or researchers sometimes get interested in bomba and then their fire or interest quickly burns out. With her continuous referencing of "hitting it and quitting it,' she is expressing accountability and expectation within the practice of bomba to those in her proximity.

love. Joining Alyssa's experience to those of Melanie from the beginning of the chapter, we see how bomba and Puerto Rican diaspora are in themselves methods of refusal and mutual aid networks.

Jennifer Nash (2011) establishes that an ethics of care is not only a Black feminist project but is borne out of love for self and community. Thus, care is a politics of love (Nash 2011), seeing (Sharpe 2016), and cultural performance even in caregiving (Black 2018). Bomba is a practice that relies on and is embedded within a practice of care. There is a deep investment to history balanced within its current practice as well as the attention to affective politics and engagement[63]. The personal healing that is felt through bomba and the sacred space of the batey extends itself to infrastructural repair through the affectively charged correction of figuras by incorporating bomba as a vehicle of protest and using the community established through the practice of bomba to find and sustain community-based and driven solutions. The figuras in this essay all happen to be mothers and their children are also all involved in bomba in some way. However, more than that, they extend the affective and intimate labor of caring to those around them, especially in the bomba community.

In *Black Food Geographies,* Ashanté Reese argues that instead of focusing on "lack" in anthropological studies of marginalized people, scholars should think about what it indicates for strategies of self-reliance as a means of refusal (2019, 11). Refusal in bomba, or Black Latinx refusal more broadly, is apparent in the traditions that lean into community and circumvent state relief, not only in the embodied sense but in the practical sense. At the top of 2020, earthquakes began impacting Puerto Rico's southern coast. Many of those cities had only just assumed a somewhat stable state in wake of Hurricane Maria and Irma and were ultimately devastated once

[63] See Lauren Berlant (2008).

again as schools had to move to outdoor teaching, as settlements were constructed on safer ground for people to sleep in, and essentials like food and water became scarce. To exacerbate matters, in January 2020 during the beginning of the series of earthquakes, a storage facility was uncovered containing supplies sent by FEMA in 2017 like water, diapers, baby formula, toilet paper, and foodstuff, much of which had gone bad. Many Puerto Ricans moved to the States as a consequence of lack of resources in Hurricane Maria's wake and many also perished, leaving the traumatic embodied memory of not only the hurricane, but also the lack of assistance in the months that followed in the Puerto Rican consciousness. The storage facility reinforced hesitation to rely on national and local governmental support during the series of earthquakes, and it elicited critique and what some deemed as righteous anger.

***La Bomba Me Cure*: Destierro, Reparations, Healing and Repair**

yo me curé / yo me sané/ con la bomba me curé/ - Hector Rivera

(I was cured/ I was healed/ with bomba I was cured)

After Hurricane Maria, many Puerto Ricans left and were finding comfort and familiarity in communities of Puerto Ricans who might not have ever even been to Puerto Rico. *Diasporicans*, or Puerto Ricans who became a part of the Puerto Rican diaspora as a result of Hurricane Maria, still held contempt for the lack of aid[64]. Thomas suggests that as much as diaspora might be imagined in terms of communal liberation, it can also be seen as a historically

[64] There have been countless times that local and national governments have been illustrative to the negligence that I am referring to but I am referencing to the President of the United States and his tossing a roll of paper towels into a crowd of Puerto Ricans when he visited the island after Hurricane Maria. An example of local governmental negligence is what would become exposed during the Summer '19 protests to oust Ricardo Rossello. A series of texts and messages referring to dead bodies in the morgue as food for crows.

contingent strategy to advance particular interests (2008, 5). Principally, the Puerto Rican diaspora was used to advance the metropole's economic and political interest, and now there is a strategic use of the diaspora to counteract the metropole's violence and neglect. In sequence, starting during Hurricane Maria and then during the Summer 2019 uprisings, hundreds of Puerto Ricans flew into the island for the historic protests that would result in the ousting of Rossello.

I recall an earthquake-prompted relief aid network headed by southern Puerto Rican artist Julie Laporte. I emphasize southern, because as Julie will tell you, the south always brings its own flavor, or at least that is what she told me after meeting me during the National Bomba Research Conference in 2019 with Melanie. It would be two months before I saw Julie again. Two months of driving and getting lost everywhere. I was invited to a birthday party where a bomba group would be playing and I made myself go since it wasn't far from my apartment. I arrived and saw no one who I could talk with. So, I awkwardly watched the first set of the bomba group, anxiously scanning the room ever so often to see if someone familiar arrived. An hour passed and then during the intermission or the *breakicito* between sets, I went for a drink and told myself if no one familiar came I would leave.

The friend who invited me arrived as I was about to finish my drink and within ten minutes of the second set starting. I was feeling better but still somewhat out of place and exhausted by what would become a frequent feeling throughout my time in the field. I was talking to my friend, and as she started introducing me to more and more people, suddenly I felt overwhelmed. Maybe it was the drums, or the singing, or the talking amongst people next to me, or how I was expected to become a part of the corillo because of one of my dance teachers being present. But I stepped into a corner to breathe and give myself a pep talk. And that is when Julie entered the party with her friends and family. Her smile cast a safety net from across the room. I

waited as she said hello to the people around her, and she made her way to me. I am not at all a "hugger" but I needed one that day. As she hugged me, she asked me if I wanted to walk with her to get food at the restaurant next door.

After the earthquakes, months later, Julie was a point person for relief efforts. Reaching out to bomberxs across the States, she gave lists of supplies needed and was the person in charge of receiving and distributing them. So, when she called for me to assist in transporting some boxes from one part of the island to another, I answered. Hundreds of people answered her call, undoubtedly because of how Julie cares for those around her, but also because she was more trustworthy than the government assistance which might sit in a storage facility for years as people ache in need. The intimacy and care built by figuras into the diaspora, the tradition of bomba, and batey-making lends itself to networks of mutual aid.

Afro-Puerto Rican scholar, Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez' (2020) conceptual meditation on *destierro* offers further understanding. Destierro is the "uprooted and untranslatable embodied dispossession" that particularly exists in the Puerto Rican diaspora (Figueroa-Vásquez 2019, 223). Her framework scaffolds off of women of color and Indigenous feminisms anchored to the idea of land rights, but also straddles both the affective and political projects of healing and reparations. She argues that boricuas born in the diaspora exist with a sense of loss. A place-making and culturally assumed healing practice like bomba might offer a salve for an individual's embodied loss.

In that way, bomba is a healing practice. Just as Melanie used bomba as a relief for communities to heal or assuage an individual's spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being, boricuas in the diaspora lean into the practice for similar relief. In their participation and dedication to the practice, they then expand and cement another web of assistance for Puerto

Ricans to tap into during times of trouble. The edited volume *Aftershocks of Disaster (*2019) questions and analyzes the structural processes and repercussions of governmental responses to Puerto Rico's catastrophe. *Aftershocks of Disaster* called for a deeper consideration of Puerto Rican existence post-Maria and post-imperial agenda. However, in their passionate analyses, there is hesitation in describing applicable or practical steps to achieve the equity they describe.

I find Figueroa's theoretical framework of destierro useful for describing the personal experience of being born in the wake of a capitalistic, conquest-driven regime with an inheritance of loss and growing into an adult with an embodied grief they have never intimately known. I put destierro into conversation with Deborah Thomas' work (2019) on postcolonial Jamaica and affect, which suggests centering affect in a way that calls for a shift in anthropological discourse surrounding sovereignty and colonial violence. How might centering feelings of persons point us as researchers and other persons to doing not only better work, but assist us in creating projects that prompt justice by exhibiting justice? Thomas' questions align with the Combahee River Collective's *How We Get Free* (2017) and the animation of their work surrounding identity politics. The work is not just about who they are, but how they confront and change the oppressive forces in their way towards getting free. More than that resounding point, Thomas argues that while reparations might be important to consider and might provide a sense of equity, what is even more important is addressing what needs repair. What lies outside the confines of a numbered loss that still needs to be tended to?

In studying bomba, I see how it offers personal healing. Ingrained within its practice is a strategy of self-reliance and survival. Reflecting on Reese's definition of refusal, there should be a reconsideration of self-reliance as a means of refusal. As Indigenous feminist anthropologist Audra Simpson argues (2014, 12), women become the optimal subjects to circumvent receiving

the "gifts" of a colonial state. The marginalized develop new strategies and practices integral to not only their everyday life, but the contestation of larger deficiencies that come along with being fungible citizens to an imperial regime. These women then refuse to accommodate what Simpson names a "colonial contortion" which allows some recognition and protection of the metropole (2014, 154). Instead, they receive and extend recognition not as subjects but as people within the care space of the batey. Through their instruction and preservation, they ensure bomberxs around them also play an active role in empowering themselves through a community facilitated recognition. These figuras, and the embodied knowledge within the physical figuras of bomba, have cemented and highlighted the ways in which bomba also offers alternative assistance outside of governmental relief or support. The community of bomberxs led by these figuras across the island and in the States provides corrective critique to the government, much like ideas put forth in *Aftershocks of Disaster* (2019). More than that, they provide an example of immediacy and improvisation. In their interpersonal and infrastructural care work, bomberxs use bomba to repair, healing themselves for losses that cannot be enumerated and repair the fissures that colonialism left.

Mujer Boricua: **Mothering, Corrective Care, and Protection in Bomba**

> "Mujer fuerte, mujer bonita, mujer boricua/ Madre de este pueblo que con tu ejemplo nos dignifica'/ la trabajadora, la linda dama de esta familia/ con amor y fuerzo luchan por este pueblo boricua"

(Strong woman, pretty woman, Puerto Rican woman/ Mother of this village always leading by example/ the worker, the pretty lady of this family/ with love and strength they fight for this Puerto Rican village) - "Mujer Boricua" by *Taller Tambuye*

"You can always tell who someone learns from, its like their mom, it comes through in their body" - Essah

On Tuesdays, after my 45-to-75-minute drive from my apartment, I would walk into my grandparents' house before my dance class later that evening. The first thing out of my mouth would be "*bendición*." Then, they respond, "*bendición, que Dios te guarde y te acompañe*." I, like many other Puerto Rican adolescents, was taught by my father to always show respect to my elders in this way as a *saludo,* or at the beginning of a conversation and as a greeting. I ask for their blessing, and then they give it by stating a brief prayer of protection. I would almost always find my grandpa on the porch doing a word search and listening to his radio for the Puerto Rico that only existed in his memory and in older songs—the Puerto Rico before his 30 years away from his *isla*. And then we would enter the house and eat some of the dinner he cooked earlier for me. On this day, and many other 95-degree days like it, my grandpa had my grandma heating up some soup for me before dance class. I would sit in their cool air conditioning because they know that I am uncomfortable by the humidity in Puerto Rico, even after several months, and blow on my hot *sancocho* or *asopao* to cool it down and watch my grandpa's fire light up the room. He told me stories about growing up in the rural mountains and then how my dad behaved as a child. My grandpa's fingers, my fingers, mark the syllables as he talks and are wrinkled, and brown having used them since young growing up on a tobacco farm. His arms, that he uses most

of the morning in his *finca* tending to his trees and plants at 80 years old, that used to sit me on his lap in his copper Chevrolet Caprice Classic and keep me safe as I would pretend to drive down the street. Those arms that kept me safe and gave me my first taste of autonomy would stretch up and out as he began gesturing to people in his memory that he calls forth in the story. His eyes are my eyes: he is someone who looks you clean in the eye as he blesses you.

After my time with my grandpa, I would always arrive at my bomba class blessed and then leave exhausted. We were learning Loiza dance vocabulary, or movements, and this time we were going to practice in the batey. We had been learning and building our endurance the last couple of weeks by dancing the paso básico to *seis corrido*[65]. The *ritmo loiceño* (rhythm from Loiza) was the fastest and the most different in its rules. I entered the dance studio ready for my quads to ache and calves to cramp. Having endured the previous classes, I knew that in order to stay on the fast rhythm and for that duration, I would have to exercise mind over matter once again. The humidity of the room hung thick in the air like a warning of the inevitable pain us dancers were inflicting on our bodies. But there was Marién, a dance instructor of tall stature, and she was telling us to form a circle. As we looked expectantly at each other, the quieter students looked pale and nervous, while Lorena, my bomba buddy since Level 1, was giddy. This was Lorena's third bomba school after taking classes in Spain and New York, she was excited to learn in Puerto Rico and especially from a "feminist" like Marién.[66] Lorena, a green-eyed economist, who was petite but muscular, was also an avid dancer and while she understands her place of privilege in Puerto Rico as a "white girl," dancing bomba made her feel powerful. Her experiences in several different dance schools made her feel even more confident. Her

[65] There are different emotional expectations and movements and customs carried within each rhythm.

[66] In person interview with Lorena. Feb 2020.

straight hair was tied into a ponytail as her eyes were darting around the room watching everyone and simultaneously watching Marién. It was humid, per usual, and the ends of her ponytail were sticking to the nape of her neck and between her shoulders damp which were with sweat. Soon, no doubt after we started dancing, Lorena would take off her shirt and dance in her sports bra because of the high temperature and humidity in the room, coupled with the intensity of the seis corrido rhythm, making it almost unbearable. Lorena stood next to me as Marién was emphasizing that in Loiza, you enter the batey by cutting off another dancer when you feel like they are done saying what they have to say. Even though bateyes sometimes require close quarters, we were under no circumstance to touch the dancer in the batey when cutting them off. However, as I would soon learn, in order to do that, you first have to lock eyes with the principal drummer—the *primo*—and then you gesture to him or her with a saludo and begin the immediate improvised movements we had just finished reviewing, or really the music making dance steps (piquetes).

It seemed simple enough, but in Loiza, the tempo is extremely fast, thus your movements are quicker and sharper and must be exaggerated so that in the hectic response time, they are appropriately performed. After weeks of learning and practicing big and fast movements, I knew that in that dance class, I had to be on point. It was my turn to practice going into the batey. I was sweaty and my quads ached, but I placed myself in front of the dancer who was provoking the drums to follow her movements. I marked the beginning of my time in the batey and began my quick promenade, when suddenly the teacher yelled out, "*otra vez*" or again.

The previous dancer returned to her spot and I attempted again. It seemed to have worked as the dancer exited and I began my piquetes, but no. Otra vez.

Maybe it was my heart racing or the eyes looking at me or the drum chorus keeping tempo under my teacher's principal drumming, but I did not have the slightest clue what I was doing wrong. I did it again, went in front of the dancer to cut her conversation off with the drum and begin my own. I was doing my sensual running which was apparently not sensual enough because I got told "*más sabroso Sarah, casi pero no*," meaning I needed to make my movements more flavorful and that I still did not cut the dancer off correctly. Otra vez.

This was the first time I was being singled out in the class in this way and my anxiety piqued. I began again with the run and caught Lorena's eye, her face looked anxious with her eyebrows almost at her foreheads limit's, she mouthed "*ojo*."[67] Otra vez.

This time, my teacher got up from behind her drum and told me to look her in the eyes when I cut her previous conversation off then do my saludo and flavorful running promenade. While she spoke to me, the other two drummers were keeping tempo and the 20 other students were still moving in the basic movements for the rhythm. The previous dancer was there. I stepped in front of her and looked my teacher square in the face with my grandpa's eyes and did my saludo and transition successfully. She laughed and nodded her head sonically marking my body's movements, or figuras, with drumming.

Marién was introduced to me formally by Melanie in August of 2019. She was also the person I saw leading bomberxs in protest during May Day demonstrations in 2018 and in the Summer 2019 protests that resulted in the ousting of Ricardo Rossello[68]. She is the founder and main instructor at *Taller Tambuye*, a dance studio located in Rio Piedras. In any given bomba class, like the one I describe above, she is instructing anywhere from 20 to 30 students. Her

[67] In different contexts "ojo" might mean "look" or "eye."

[68] The demonstrations are documented widely on social media, I am referencing seeing Marién and by consequence, other *tambuyeros*, on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

teaching style is often described as intense or incorporating her "strong personality"[69]. Her pedagogy leans into the embodied memories of bomba as she begins teaching aspiring bomberxs the different basic steps or paseo básicos. She slowly but surely adds different types of continuous movements to the basic steps like moving forwards, backwards, horizontally, and turning. As she begins teaching one rhythm, she plays the rhythm constantly with another accompanying drummer speaking loudly into her microphone calling out changes in directions or prompting different figuras: right arm out, postura, left arm out, or arm stylings for a skirt[70]. She spends about four to five weeks on one rhythm at a time, culminating in constructing a batey where students practice entering, improvising, and exiting. Her pedagogy is unique, as she keeps the rhythm of the week constant and expects students to continuously be moving from start to finish of the class. She emphasizes body memory and the training of a body to acquire the knowledge both actively and passively as a habit through continuous and repetitive practice.

Marién introduces each rhythm with specific exercises. In doing so, she demonstrates a level of care, not only about her craft, but also in preparing her students to succeed both in class and in the larger bomba community. She creates group chats on WhatsApp for each class and she keeps students updated on bomba events every week. She cultivates an atmosphere of intimacy within her class to imitate the sacred ground of bomba[71]. She knows her students by name and

[69] [18] Interlocutor said "fuerte de carácter." Translation my own.

[70] The basic posture in dance which might be most recognized in Afro-diasporic dance as *akimbo* or feet shoulder-width apart with knees bent and arms bent with hands at hips.

[71] This phrase comes from a Facebook status of a bombero and another instructor from Taller Tambuye, Carlos. He teaches the bomba adjacent martial art/combat dance, kokobale. Both me and Marién were in his first semester of class together, as we were the only women we often sparred together. This is important to note because although Marién and I were familiar, there were no favorites. In fact, she might have been even more direct with me because of our rapport. Also, *bomba* is not a religious practice or attached to a specific religion. But it has been described as a spiritual or sacred experience because of the rich history within the tradition. For more on *bomba* and spirituality within an afro-diasporic context please see Ashley Coleman Taylor's "Water Overflows with Memory" (2019).

they number in the hundreds. It is this level of affective care about the person beyond the dancer that illustrates why she is a figura. More than that, her correction in class is an act of love. In my own experience, she might call out, "*rodillas Sarah, siempre y siempre*" ("Knees Sarah, forever and ever") meaning that my frequent problem was (and is) that I am not bending my knees enough.[72] Correction might be giving you chances to self-correct until you absolutely need to be shown but despite any embarrassment you feel her intention is clear. Marién corrects you because she cares and sees that you care through dedication to her class and improvement. In Lorena's case, she disliked being called out by Marién as it is uncomfortable for anyone, but Lorena understood that her errors were because she had been taught incorrectly by her previous bomba instructors. Thus, Lorena was faced with an arguably even more difficult task of unlearning. She grew in her understanding and in her comfort as Marién continued to not only call us out but also celebrate us when we executed movements correctly.

Figuras exist as an embodied pedagogical and historical intervention in Puerto Rican, Black, Anthropological, and Dance studies, and more than that, in discourse with scholarship on Black mothering. Anthropologist Christen Smith argues that the slow death, or *sepuelae*, or state sanctioned violence rendering Black people as disposable within Brazil, is threatened by the Black mothers of the fallen (2016). Smith illustrates that the mourning and grief-informed activism taking place among Afro-Brazilian mothers threatens the state's violence by affirming the humanity of those murdered at the hands of the militarized police. A mother (re)producing a child that has been murdered and grieving them in public is a declarative act of subjugated

[72] In a class of 20-30 students in a school with dozens of classes that she heads, she remembers which problems are most frequent for each student. Her emphasis on knee bending is directly linked to bomba as an Afro-diasporic dance.

human condition and shifts the dehumanizing or monstrous gaze back on the state.[73] Similarly, Puerto Rico women, and Black women in particular, occupy a mother positionality that corrects and contends with the state in an affectively similar manner.[74] In summation, through this meditation of figuras, the infrastructural correction and expectation of accountability amongst Puerto Rican women is an example of the mothering and care work done by bomberas.

A large part of mothering, as shown by Marién, is corrective labor to ensure that the next generation is successful. Her correction can be intimate in her classes as she tells you to repeat a motion again and again until you ask for help or it becomes clear that you must be shown by example. There was a time, for instance, after the COVID-19 pandemic started and shelter-in-place began, that bomba classes moved to Zoom. I was doing a movement incorrectly because my arm was at a 45-degree upward angle instead of a 90-degree angle, making the wrong figura and even in our Zoom bomba class Marién corrected me. She saw me and my potential for accomplishment despite the socially distant conditions. That correction is no different than her critiquing local and national governments in front of Fortaleza through bomba. It sits within and outside of the bounds of translatability as she corrects the conquistador state and affirms her humanity and those around her, thus being entitled to more than they are receiving.[75] The protest and play adjoining the practice are cemented by these figuras and their pedagogies and the

---

[73] For more on the discourse surrounding Black mothering since the Transatlantic Slave Trade for an ontological perspective please see Angela Davis (1972), Hortense Spillers (1987). Alys Weinbaum (2019) then adds to this discourse by focusing on how racial capitalism is directly linked to the bio capitalist role enforced on Black women as a result of chattel slavery. I also reference *Monstrous Intimacies* by Christina Sharpe (2010).

[74] As explained in Christen Smith's article, Black mothering extends itself beyond the reproductive role that some women may play. Instead, she argues and makes clear that as a result of Black kinship structures even aunts, elders, or cousins might also participate in the intimate and affective labor of caring that one might associate with mothering, extending this argument to these individuals as well.

[75] *Within and outside of the bounds of translatability* is a reference to Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals* (2019: 63). Again, entitlement as a characteristic is following Aimee Cox and the theoretical and intellectual contributions put forth in *Shapeshifters.*

examples they set on structural and personal levels[76]. In this way, these figuras do what Hartman described: they "discern the glimmer of possibility, feel the ache of what might be" (2019, 30). Their entitlement for a better life, their refusal to accept the bare minimum, or the gift of United States citizenship is contained in the embodied and it inscribes practices related to bomba that transcend linear temporal and geopolitical constraints.

Marién's care extends itself beyond teaching bomba. She cares about Puerto Rico, and the women of Puerto Rico. I discuss her involvement with *Ausuba* and in working with domestic violence victims in other sections of this dissertation, but I focus on how her approach to bomba not only shapes dancers but also Puerto Rico. Marién not only imparts figuras for dancers to make in the batey, but she also works to correct her society writ large to rid it of its violent policies and silence which makes her a figura amongst bomberxs. During the Summer of 2019, later that year, and at the top of 2020, Marién continued to adjoin her *bombeando* to a political consciousness that is critical of the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico as well as the frequent and pervasive gender violence in Puerto Rico. There is a historical legacy that puts bomba in close proximity to resistance, delineating it as a resistant practice. In this way, Marién establishes correction as a tool of care that lends itself in her interpersonal relationships with her students, but also as a colonial citizen. Her and the other figuras' expectations of being listened to, or her entitlement, comes from a knowledge of self and structures that surround and align them as figuras within the Black Feminist Praxis.[77] "She won't remember the routine wreckage she used to walk through barefoot here. She sands it out"

[76] *Protest and play* as Black Feminist Practice is brought forth by Aimee Cox in *Shapeshifters* (2015: 141)

[77] Here, I am referencing once again Aimee Cox (2015). Cox discusses that the ways in which Black women and girls advocate for themselves comes from a sense of entitlement and self-worth. This is indicative of their Black Feminist approach and positioning to demand equity and transformation.

(Gumbs 2016, 27). Marién, and the other figuras, through their positioning as mayores in the bomba community, are prompting and molding bomba to also be a tool in the liberation of Puerto Rican women against the violence permeating Puerto Rico's culture and state. In their ability to feel how colonialism wrecks life around them, they attend to imperial disasters to attempt to live a life beyond the bounds of colonialism. Through their refusal of state aid, their care work, and critical engagement with the tradition of bomba, these figuras demonstrate how emotional dexterity is a cornerstone of the ontological positioning of a colonial subject. Their embodied and enacted emotional dexterity is what facilitates their ability to endure and outlast, and as in bomba, challenge the continuous rhythmic acts of violence against them.

Chapter 3

"No Me Va A Dar" (You're not going to hit me):

Decolonial Feminisms, Gender Violence, and a Black Latinx Perspective Towards Coalition

"*Querian candela? Candela les traigo yo/ candela pa' lo corruptos empezando con Roselló/ Oye Ricky, no te pongas bruto que Puerto Rico te habló!/ no fue que renunciaste, el pueblo te botó!"*

They wanted fire? I will bring the heat to them. Heat for the corrupt, starting with Roselló. Hey Ricky don't get mad that Puerto Rico called you out, you didn't resign, the nation threw you out!

- Plena Combativa "Candela"

In Summer of 2019, when Roselló gave his speech resigning from office, I was just 30 minutes from my home on the Southside of Chicago where I was raised. I had been invited to a *perreo combativo* by the Chicago Boricua Resistance organization in the historic and iconic northwest Puerto Rican neighborhood of Humboldt Park. The storefront space that would host a DJ and a live projection of the speech taking place in Puerto Rico that night was located between the Puerto Rican flag statues that mark the beginning and end of *paseo boricua.* I drove past them to pick my friend Alyssa up from the train so that she wouldn't have to walk to the event alone. I thought about how wild this summer was and how it would be one of the first nonacademic-centered events I'd be able to partake in in Chicago since moving away for college. The statues of the flags remained unchanged as if no time had passed. They were built to last centuries despite the ongoing mobilizations on social media and public platforms. They still stand broad, forever unfurled in a world that once outlawed them. Alyssa was someone I met through poetry and then again in a bomba percussion class that my cousin taught. She would later go on to be in most of my Chicago-based bomba classes.

We arrived at the event. There were Puerto Ricans who had recently moved to the city due to the negligence after Hurricane Maria and there were Chi Ricans who I have known as

family friends for the majority of my life. We all lost ourselves in conversation and reggaeton, the bass moving our bodies to talk when the music was too loud for conversation. The humidity in the space was as thick as it would be outside of the *Fortaleza* in Old San Juan. Then, the music cut off and Roselló was being projected onto the wall. He was resigning and people were shouting for joy and almost immediately the DJ switched the audio from the projector to what would become a breakup empowerment song turned political anthem for that summer, *Te boté.* While I had just returned from Puerto Rico, there was no other place I'd rather be. I witnessed a win, and that night I couldn't distinguish the cheers of island-born Puerto Ricans from those born in Chicago or New York.

This chapter uses ethnography and textual analysis of bomba songs to move from an individual focused analysis that transnationally spans different styles of leading, teaching, and mentoring to a more infrastructural analysis centrally locating bomba as a practice that not only preserves how the oldest colony in the world felt liberated under extreme oppression, but also serves to indict gender violence and antiblackness[78]. There were all types of Puerto Rican genres of music present during the protests of 2019: *plena*, reggaeton, and bomba[79]. However, in this chapter, like the rest of my project, I focus on how bomba and its batey open studies of decoloniality to practices of accountability, persevering, and (re)imagination that are deeply visceral and central to the 2019 social movement's success and other ongoing transnational organizing against imperial violence. In this chapter, I center bomba as a community practice.

I was in Puerto Rico for two weeks or so before making my big move to kick off fieldwork. Mostly, I went earlier to look for a place and to take some items and leave them there at my grandparents' home. I wasn't having much luck with realtors or responsiveness, and while

[78] For more on figuras see Chapter 2.
[79] All of these genres of music are considered Afro-Puerto Rican genres.

my immediate family joined me and tried to make my house search/work trip successful, they tried to make it a family vacation. It was my sister-in-law's first time in Puerto Rico and meeting my grandparents, and she was getting updated on the state of Puerto Rican politics. While I was stressed out and used my hotspot to power up the Wi-Fi on my laptop looking for furnished apartments in Puerto Rico, my sister-in-law was learning about the recent scandal taking center stage not only locally but globally regarding Puerto Rico's governor.

Ricardo Roselló and his appointed cabinet members were under federal investigation for the mismanagement of relief funds, poor response, and further corruption in the wake of Hurricane Maria. The Hurricane, which occurred in 2017, in many ways, through its residual destruction and prompting of (re)building, laid the path bare for bomba to be privileged in the ways we come to understand Afro-Puerto Rican knowledge that lies outside the gaze of colonialism and the violence tethered to it. The criticism came to head in July 2019. Roselló was under fire because of a leak from a group chat involving high ranking officials. In the chat that became known as the RickyLeaks, the governor made sexist and degrading comments about previous Miss Universe contestants from Puerto Rico[80]. He seconded and made violent comments regarding Puerto Rican women in government positions, particularly the mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulin Cruz, going so far as to joke about another official's desire to shoot her dead. He made homophobic comments about Ricky Martin. In addition to this tasteless, harmful discourse found in the chat, the most disturbing to many Puerto Ricans inside the archipelago and in the diaspora were the jokes and comments regarding the dead bodies in the overpopulated morgues of Puerto Rico. As more and more bodies filled the morgues, the budget for a forensic

[80] During an investigation several hundred pages of persona respondence between Roselló and members of his office were made public prompting a social movement to descend upon Puerto Rico like never before. See "These are some of the leaked chat messages at the center of Puerto Rico's political crisis" by Ray Sanchez on *CNN.com* (https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/16/us/puerto-rico-governor-rossello-private-chats)

pathologist was brought to the governor's attention and his fiscal officer replied, "We should start feeding the cadavers to crows."

Beyond the disgust of the violence demonstrated by the sexist and homophobic comments of the chat, the disrespect of the Puerto Rico's fallen was the last straw. In the days, weeks, and months after Hurricane Maria, many people in the diaspora were wrestling anxiety and heart wrenching preoccupations of their unaccounted loved ones. In *Aftershocks of Disaster*, an edited volume examining and rendering the ways imperialism failed Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria, Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón write, "We know now that the majority of those who lost their lives to Maria perished not because of the storm but because of the structural failures that followed" (2019, 3).[81] Immediately after the hurricane, President Trump boasted a 16 person death toll, that then became 64, and then was hypothesized by the reputable Harvard study to be as high as 4654 people lost—and those numbers continued rising.[82] The morgues in Puerto Rico remained beyond capacity because of the constant exodus, health problems, and the rise in suicide after Maria. The disgraceful comments that came to symbolize imperial negligence and abandonment prompted a collective and justifiable moment of anger that will continue to reverberate long after Maria.

Soon after RickyLeaks became public discourse, protests were organized[83]. There I was, looking for an apartment during what could very well be the largest Puerto Rican social movement of my lifetime. People from all over the States were flying in, paying exorbitant last

[81] The edited volume, edited by Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, was released after the Summer 2019 events and during the peak of the earthquakes that would begin to plague Puerto Rico when literal aftershocks were shaking the archipelago. The structural failures that followed are most notably the electrical and political infrastructural weaknesses made clear. Soon during the pandemic and earthquakes the vulnerabilities within the health care system in Puerto Rico would become stringently apparent.

[82] Due to health problems as well as rises in violence due to the ways that people in the archipelago were neglected. Most tragically is the story of Jessica Moraima Ventura Pérez, a teenager who died in Vieques, Puerto Rico due to the lack of a hospital being rebuilt post-Maria.

[83] Wikipedia also calls the event "telegramgate."

minute airline fees to also be a part of this moment, this movement of condemnation against colonial violence. Many people realized that even if the governor was not from the United States, he was an agent of the imperial power that had left many of them, their family members, and their island without relief. The fumbling of proper provisions and timely response exacerbated already dire circumstances. People from all over the island organized demonstrations in each of their municipalities, or drove to the central demonstration outside of Fortaleza, the governor's mansion in San Juan.

I was there on the cobblestoned streets, walking amongst other Puerto Ricans, even tourists joined as they could not ignore the droves of people who covered Old San Juan. Cars were parking wherever possible, some even on the emergency lanes on the highway as the drivers jumped out to join the protest. Signs and chants not only condemned the governor's actions, but those of *La Junta*, the financial oversight board that was put in place as an authorial and appointed body to manage Puerto Rico[84]. While many were afraid of chaos, there was none despite repeated agitation of civilians by police and national guard in full riot gear.[85] This mirrors what Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez in *Decolonizing Diasporas* (2020) calls a "moment of indictment," where people were moved by a collective hurt, and in this case were also moved by music. In the midst of all the car horns, chanting, and heat, drums produced a centering heartbeat outside of La Fortaleza. Bomba was there and the batey was open as bomberxs from the diaspora and the archipelago embraced the resistant endurance embedded within the genre.

That day in San Juan will be etched onto the flesh of every person present, but that was

[84] While many protestors focused on La Junta or the financial oversight board during the Summer '19 protests, it is important to note that the oversight board was put in place during President Obama's administration.
[85] Many can see these instances on social media, while many major news outlets neglected to report such instances.

not the day that resulted in the ousting of the now former governor[86]. Roselló resigned after continued demonstrations that took place beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the archipelago in Spain, Switzerland, Hawaii, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, and anywhere Puerto Ricans resided. Many of these demonstrations were led in collaboration, so that the diaspora that was once thought to be a part and separated from the archipelago, was now solidifying its place as an integral part within Puerto Rican culture and discourse.

Bomberxs and Afro-Puerto Rican women who were mobilizing after Hurricane Maria and during the protests of 2019 and 2020 were calling specific attention to the ways that colonialism has deserted women. Femmes in particular, as discussed in previous chapters, weather the continual storm of violence and emotional labor as they continue to be the foundational and simultaneously disposable cornerstone of the imperial project[87]. The embodied knowledge located within the practice and discipline of *bomba con conciencia* prompts emotional dexterity that enables anyone, Puerto Rican or not, to be moved or be a part of a movement that defends and preserves life. As demonstrated, the practice of bomba is not only relegated to dancing, singing, or playing instruments. There is a strong investment in history and memory, but also in how one wants to be remembered. There is an equally important emphasis within the tradition on how one must live life. Bomba allows for a transcendence beyond linear time and space, and in this chapter, I continue to illustrate how bomberxs use it to recenter communities outside of Puerto Rico and in the diaspora.

Within the last decade, gender violence in Latin America has garnered international

[86] Here, I am thinking along with Hortense Spiller's meditation on the flesh and the ways in which colonial subjects have an ontological existence that marks them. Their bodies are treated as perpetual objects of the colonial state.
[87] I use femmes to include the numerous members of the LGBTQ community who prescribe to feminine presentation and are thus just as susceptible to patriarchal violences as cis-gendered straight women.

attention, with specific focus of the US media on the Mexican border and Narco violence[88]. The *frontera*, however, as Anzaldúa (1987) has established, exists as more than just a geopolitical boundary and becomes a porous ontological position mirroring the permeable borderlands. Similarly, the Puerto Rican border has long been discussed as an malleable state of being rather than a geopolitical border, especially with all of the Puerto Ricans and DiaspoRicans in the States. Coupled with the centering and popularity of social media platforms as change agents in social movements for political reform and redress, Puerto Rico's issues with gender violence have long been established even before the Hurricane. The archipelago and the States has invisibilized and legitimized state-sanctioned femicide since Puerto Rico's inception and the prompting of an imperial project to position it within a perpetual looped state of coloniality[89]. Here, I focus on the coalition building efforts in Puerto Rico and its diaspora that indict the antiblack police violence happening in the United States during the summer of 2020. I thread together how #NiUnaMas and #SayHerName mirror the ways in which the United States has disregarded women of color and how bomba continues to be the space where these women are uplifted, defended, and revered. I examine how bomberxs use their emotional logics to assist in the healing or betterment of all women, particularly in Tijuana, Mexico, a city known for its unrepentant cartels and violence against women. Bomberxs understand that colonialism has carved out space not only for global antiblackness, but for global patriarchal violence as well. Bomba, the community of bomberxs, and the embodied knowledge we gain from the batey and *mayores* is how we can outlast or endure. Bomba is *resistencia.*

[88] See "Un violador en tu camino," a performance piece as a part of a demonstration condemning that began in Chile and then spanned across Latin America, being performed in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and even in the United States.

[89] See Ruiz (2019) and Chapter 1.

The Curation of (Post-colonial) Gender Violence: Bomberxs in Protest and in Defense of Women

Que tal si cuando una la matan no cuestione su vestir/ que enseñar el machismo del que el quiso agredir/Libre y peligrosa/ libre y peligrosa soy yo/ libre y peligrosa pa quien no me quieren aquí/ libre y peligrosa soy pa quien no me quiere así.

How about when someone murders a woman we don't question how they were dressed/ instead we teach about the machismo is being perpetuated/ free and dangerous/ I am free and dangerous for those who don't want me here/ I am free and dangerous for those who don't want me like this

-Plena Combativa

Soon after Roselló resigned, the new Puerto Rican governor Wanda Vázquez was appointed. It is important to note that she was not elected, and that many protestors were not satisfied with this change. However, once in office, Vázquez issued a nationwide state of alertness due to the extreme amounts of gender violence. Since then, the newly sworn in Governor Pedro Pierlusi signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency that would prompt the allocation of resources to address the surge in murders linked to gender violence. Just in 2020, there were a total of 60. This executive order comes after decades of work by feminist groups and organizers who have demanded that the Puerto Rican administration be accountable to eradicate the disposability of women in society[90]. Yet, the fungibility of Black women in

[90] For more on the new executive order and next steps see "Puerto Rico declares state of emergency over gender violence crisis" by Cristina Corujo on *abcnews.com* Jan 25 2021 (https://abcnews.go.com/US/puerto-rico-declares-state-emergency-gender-violence-crisis/story?id=75469572)

Puerto Rico and in the States continues to be unresolved and, for the most part, unaddressed with any measurable prevention in place[91].Bomberxs operate outside and between geopolitical borders to defend Black life and the lives of women and queer femmes that colonialism renders disposable. Bomba continues to allow practitioners to extend the tradition of inscription within its practice that prompts the people in the batey to feel empowered and connected to those around them and beyond their temporal and geopolitical territorial boundaries. Practitioners are prompted to endure colonialism instead of succumbing to it. This became apparent as new bomba schools in Buffalo, New York and Orlando, Florida were founded not long after the largest exodus of Puerto Ricans left the archipelago[92]. Bomba continued to be a place to (re)center communities and families after painful displacement or *destierro.* However, as women and femmes are targets of ongoing violence inflicted by the infrastructures of conquest, they are also the same people within the bomba community who extend the genre's tradition of resolve and courage to make sure it is inscribed onto the next generation of bomberxs.

Much like Deborah Thomas (2019) in *Exceptional Violence*, I am not suggesting that there is a cultural condition of violence fused within Puerto Rican culture. Thomas highlights the dangers of such arguments by examining those of anthropologist Oscar Lewis. Lewis (1966) argued that there was culture of poverty in Puerto Rican society and Thomas outlines how his arguments led to racist and classist policies that followed Jamaicans. These policies encouraged and institutionalized antiblackness against Jamaicans within the British empire. Lewis' arguments also prompted United States intervention to enact and enforce problematic policies that further criminalized Puerto Ricans and denigrated public opinion towards Puerto Rico.

[91] Domestic violence shelters continue to be underfunded and organizations who continue to center and protect women also are not receiving adequate funds to implement and expand necessary programming. More than that, public service campaigns in the United States continue to neglect the intersectional intimate violence

[92] Puerto Rico is a collection of islands, although in literature Puerto Ricans have wrote about "the island."

Thomas links violence to a class issue that is exacerbated by the structural consequences of the plantation and colonial schema. So, I extend the argument framed by Thomas about Jamaica to Puerto Rico: if, in fact, the engine of colonialism is capitalism, then the same biocapitalism that drove the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is the same ideology that orchestrates the slow and violent death of women in Puerto Rico.

The gendered and raced reading set forth by literary scholar Alys Weinbaum (2019) in *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery* enters the ongoing Black studies discourse critiquing the canonical structural analysis of capitalism by Karl Marx (1867) for ignoring the ways that chattel slavery served as the cornerstone of society, not just the working class. Weinbaum argues that Marx's analysis of capitalism lacked a racial lens and further perpetuated a colorblind class argument. She cites the intervention put forth by Black studies scholar Cedric Robinson in his foundational text on racial capitalism, *Black Marxism* (1983). Weinbaum then adjoins a Black Marxist reading with a Black feminist work. Weinbaum, joining the likes of Spillers (1987) and Davis (1972), demonstrates how slavery and thus capitalism relied on the commodification of the womb of Black women. If we are to understand that colonialism and capitalism relied on the labors of Black people, then the true reliance was on the birthing labors of Black women[93]. It is the exploitation of physical bodies and emotions of Black women that renders them disposable for the purpose of the metropole as well as instrumental for the imperial control over a colony.

The violence happening to women in Puerto Rico is not an innate cultural tendency, rather it is a byproduct of the enduring infrastructural patriarchal violence that permeates the colonial-conquistador project. Many people, inside and outside the academy, have attributed the issue of intimate partner abuse and femicide in Puerto Rico or in the States (Pérez 2004) to

[93] For further elaboration on the commodification of the womb or the ways in which slavery relied on the life and dehumanization of enslaved women see Chapter 2.

machismo, or an alternative idea that Latina or Puerto Rican women find themselves susceptible to domination or passivity called *marianismo*[94]. However, as I have demonstrated through the *bomberas*' daily praxis and during the multitude of times under extraordinary duress, passivity is not a cultural disposition of Afro-Puerto Rican women. Instead, these women in the Caribbean, the States, and wherever they might find themselves in the world draw on a preserved ancestral knowledge passed on by elders to endure and their very survival is a threat to the imperial project. Colonialism is a constant looping of negligence and violence from which bomba practitioners draw on the choreography of empire to create their anticolonial choreography. Bomberxs are (re)writing the historical silencing of Black Puerto Rican resistance and the disposability of women, and in turn are actualizing refusal of infrastructural support from the United States.

The irony is that the displaced Puerto Ricans and the DiaspoRicans, which were supposed to make Puerto Rico weaker after Operation Bootstrap, makes them stronger and are pivotal in the global reckoning of the United States' violence. The paradox of the diaspora acting as a reparative structure is not one lost on bomberxs or more broadly Puerto Ricans in the wake of Hurricane Maria, the prompting of earthquakes, and during the political unrest of 2019. The very intentional relocation and dispersal of Puerto Ricans during Operation Bootstrapwas meant to make the territory more malleable or governable and less threatening[95]. The thinning of Puerto Ricans was established through the physical migration and sterilization of Puerto Rican women, once again emphasizing how control of a colony is largely tethered to women. However,

[94] The feminine opposing construct that often accompanies *machismo*. Marianismo is derived from the iconic figure of the Virgin Mary, further enforcing the ideological programming that women are supposed to aspire as a docile, maternal, or virginal.

[95] During the early mid 20th century the United States strived to establish authoritative controls in Puerto Rico via a number or policies and orders, for more reading see Laura Briggs (2002) or Nelson Antonio Denis (2015).

diaspora becomes the very balm in perilous times which comes to the aid of Puerto Ricans on the archipelago. For example, when the DiaspoRicans flocked to the archipelago to show a strength of numbers to indict Roselló, most of the public discourse surrounded the disrespectful comments of the dead and not the casual show of gender violence and the lackadaisical desire for femicide. The song that was created in response to RickyLeaks and became emblematic of the Summer 2019 uprisings by Residente and Bad Bunny, for example, lacked a critique of the disposability of women. Instead, the song *afilando los cuchillos* focused insults on Roselló's personal life and critiqued his administration's corruption, the ways Puerto Rico still has many roofs covered by FEMA tarps, the 4,654 lives lost, mismanagement of public funds, and how his disrespect united a people that tend to be drastically separated by party. For a split second, Bad Bunny does call Roselló a homophobe, with little mention of the ways that the former governor and his close cabinet members casually discussed murdering Puerto Rican women public officials.

Bomba, since its inception, has been an anchoring technique for those displaced and disenfranchised. It is no surprise that women and recently displaced Puerto Ricans and diaspoRicans dedicate themselves to the tradition and its preservation. Ausuba, an all-women's bomba group was established long before Hurricane Maria. After the hurricane, the group (headed by one of my *figuras*) released a song titled *no me va a dar* which indicted the rise of intimate partner violence, emotional manipulation, and femicide. The song details a woman who falls in love and is deciding whether or not to give her new relationship a chance.

creeía muy bien en esta relación,

el dia de nuestra primera discusión,

tu no me pones una mano encima.

(I believed it was a good relationship,

The day of our first argument,

You will not put one hand on me)

Then, the woman notices her partner's anger as he attempts or achieves putting hands on her. Ausuba arranged the song to an empowering and sensual *cuembé*, emphasizing how domestic violence is oftentimes wrapped in seduction as well. The protagonist in the song begins to wonder about how life might look if she leaves him and if he caught her with someone else. At that point, Ausuba shifts to a fierce and rapidly paced *seis corrido*[96]:

Que pasaría si me ve con otro,

si me trataría respetuoso…

Tú no me vengas a pegar,

No me vengas a maltratar,

asi no dejas a golpear,

a ti van a respetar,

deja la mano a acariciar

hija no van a golpear,

y estoy por ti pa' aqui luchar,

a ti no van a maltratar,

no vengan a manipular

no dejan controlar,

eso es manipulación emocional

[96] This rhythmic transition during an original song is not uncommon, *no me va a dar* would be understood or explained as a cuembé corrido. For more on the rhythms in bomba and intricacies differentiating drumming patterns from one another see Barton (1996).

y no te voy a dejar

que no que no que no

no me va a dar

(What would happen if he saw me with another

if that he or the other person would treat me respectfully,

you're not going to hit me

you're not going to mistreat me

don't let him hit you like that

they're going to respect you

stop letting his hand caress you/ his hand should only be caressing you

daughter, they're not going to hit you

and I'm here to fight for you

they're not going to mistreat you

[they better not] don't come to manipulate

don't let them control you,

that is emotional manipulation,

and I won't leave you,

no no no no

you're not going to hit me)

This song is representative of how the documentation of feminine narratives and community centered archiving practices remain at the core of bomberas' care work. As discussed in Chapter 2 with my analytic of figuras, there is an immense amount of care work and intimacy interwoven

within bomba that (re)locates this tradition and practice within the Black feminist discourses surrounding mothering. What is most striking in this song is that, subsequently after the change from a cuembé to a seis corrido, the speaker begins to call out and urge who we assume is the main protagonist to not tolerate the abuse. She does so by invoking a maternal authority by calling her "*hija*." Like the bomberxs outside of Fortaleza holding the ex-governor accountable for his actions, Ausuba makes implicit the ways bomba acts as a space of recognition and community for women in a state that allows their death and continual abuse. Even now, after Puerto Rico had no electricity for months and while most of the domestic violence shelters were at capacity or left closed without funding, there continues to be a rise in requests for gender violence support. ESCAPE, an organization that offers prevention and intervention services for domestic violence and children's abuse cases in several areas of the island, saw a 62% increase in requests for survivor-related services and 47% surge in requests for preventive and education resources[97]. Just as violence against Black women post-Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans raged on and continues to largely be unaddressed, it rages in Puerto Rico[98].

It comes as no surprise that the women in Ausuba understand the ways that bomba encourages endurance and emotional dexterity as women navigate their daily lives throughout the world. Marién, one the figuras and one of my mayores is a founder of Ausuba and very active in feminist-led organizing in Puerto Rico[99]. This is not to say that bomba spaces are exempt from the violence of colonial patriarchy. I am saying that bomba becomes the space where women confront it head on. Nubia, a bombera from Puerto Rico, recalls her favorite bomba:

---

[97] See "After Hurricane Maria, A Hidden Crisis of Violence Against Women in Puerto Rico" by Andrea Gonzalez-Ramirez on *Refinery19.com*, Sept. 19, 2018 (https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/09/210051/domestic-violence-puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-effects-anniversary)

[98] For more on the ways in which Hurricane Katrina left Black women even more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and gender violence see "Witness: The Racialized Gender Implications of Katrina" by Bergin (2008).

[99] See figuras in Chapter 2, I also reference Marién in Chapter 1.

"traelo, mi vida traelo/ traelo echalo pa' 'ca/ están haciendo un preparamiento/ esa bandolera lo quiere matar."

(bring it, bring my life/ bring it and cast it here/ they are preparing/ they want to kill that (thieving) cheating woman)

The song describes a woman being criminalized for whatever reason, and in fact she could be being lied about in efforts to control her. But the fact remains, people want the woman dead. What echoes even louder than the barriles playing a yubá, is that this woman is deemed disposable. Yet the batey is where femmes choose to and where they have always been engaging in Afro-Atlantic practices of Black femme freedom[100]. By making their choice and acting on it, women in the batey are resisting and condemning patriarchal violence by taking up space and affirming their importance. Not only do bomberas use bomba as a means of healing, calling for accountability, and indicting violence committed in Puerto Rico, they work together within their networks to use bomba to affirm women outside of the United States.

After sweating and losing feeling in my legs in a bomba class with Marién at Taller Tambuye, she gathered us together. Some of the other students left the sticky and musty room since we were already being held 20 minutes past the official end of class. But most of us hobbled with sore muscles and glistening skin toward our *maestra*. She explained that the following week, she would not be leading class, but she would be leaving her teaching assistant in charge. As much as it hurt her to disrupt our semester and to not be present at Tambuye, she had been called to do work that is equally important to her. She stood up from her barril and

[100] See chapter 1 and 4 for more on Jessica Johnson's theorization of *black femme freedom* (Wicked Flesh 2020).

looked at us with her straight hair pasted to the sides of her face and in a ponytail as she reiterated that bomba is about community and healing. She would be joining another one of her bomba sisters to go to California and Mexico to support women at the border in Tijuana. They would give a *taller*, or bomba workshop, so that they could also be empowered and healed. She emphasized her commitment not only to us and the tradition of bomba, but also to women who are in need of support and strength.

It wouldn't be until September 2020 when I would finally get to ask how that trip to the frontera went. I did not get to ask Marién, whose schedule was filled to the brim with online Zoom classes to adjust for the ways that COVID-19 and quarantine impacted her business. Instead, I spoke with Ivelisse, who went on the trip with Marién, which sounded more like a mission. Ivelisse said that although they had the option to stay in California, they decided to stay in Tijuana to be closer to the women and not have to worry about the complexities of commuting across the border every day. Some women, she said, had been there for weeks or months and others had been there just for a few days. They were excited to have a break in the lagging hours that passed by each day. Ivelisse said they focused on *sicá* and yubá rhythms and movements. It didn't matter that they were Mexican and that bomba was a Puerto Rican genre, because in the batey they were connected and able to feel the power that bomba has.

Tijuana has long been documented as a site along the US-Mexico border that allows local authorities and cartels to enact gender violence resulting in an ongoing territory war between cartels. In recent years, many movies and shows in Hollywood, such as *Queen of the South* and *Narcos,* have represented of Tijuana as a hotbed of rampant human trafficking. Much of the cartels' interrelated drug and human trafficking business is interlinked and operates due to their perceived fungibility of women. The project that brought Ivelisse and Marién together from

Puerto Rico was *Bomba sin fronteras,* done in part with a local bombera who crossed between the Tijuana and California border several times a day. This further implicates bomba as a Puerto Rican model of decoloniality and refusal, but also it positions it as a transnational Latinx consciousness that prompts practitioners to lean into advocating for people beyond themselves. The tenets of the affective states within bomba, and that compose the Afro-Puerto Rican embodied archive, are ever present as Marién and Ivelisse used bomba as a means of sharing how emotional dexterity is inscribed within the batey and onto those who enter it. The workshop was called "Bomba sin fronteras," which means "bomba without borders," and points back to the fact that bomberxs find themselves as a community untethered to colonial logics of time and space[101]. Bomberas understand that the batey transcends geopolitical boundaries and allows for an intimate network outside of colonial purview to exist. The batey strengthens both the individual and social body.

There, in those workshops, where DiaspoRicans and Puerto Ricans from the archipelago came together, Mexican women were introduced to the transformative rhythm and historical context of yubá. As they moved their bodies and listened to the lyrics and felt the vibrations of the barril, along with strong voices of Marién and Ivelisse, they were able to feel present. They were in their bodies, safe from their traumatic memories or circumstances. Bomba becomes the space where women can indict the colonial violence that targets them in public and intimate spheres. Through song, dance, lyrics, and networks, bomberas are able to acknowledge and advocate for one another to hold accountable those who may deem them disposable. And while bomba, as a genre, holds uncountable knowledge about the lives of Afro-Puerto Ricans, I am also highlighting how as a result of diaspora, bomba has become a transnational tool that

[101] see Chapter 1 for more on the batey as a means of side-stepping vertical time and space and operating from a horizontal approach.

(re)focuses resistance on embodied knowledge and inscription that defies borders.

#SayHerName and #NiUnaMas: Bomba in Defense of Black life

After the ruling in the wake of Breonna Taylor, I went to bomba dance class exhausted. My teacher from La Escuelita Bombera de Corazón[102] said we were going to "dance for Breonna tonight," and played a yubá. A yubá is a rhythm of depth that involves pain, veneration, rage, courage, and war. It is a complicated rhythm representative of the complications of colonialism, antiblackness, and transnational identities most Afro-Puerto Ricans broker daily. Dancing a yubá for Breonna with my bomba teacher in Chicago affirmed what I have known since I sought to craft a temporally enduring cartography of feminine affect of Black Puerto Rican women: the embodied historical tradition of feeling and navigating colonial subjecthood lies in the traditions that act as a salve to a destierro, or a pain that aches beyond the geopolitical boundaries[103]. That night in bomba I felt defeated and numb for Breonna. Of course, the justice system fails Black women. We live in a country where people in power refuse to denounce white supremacy. But, in that virtual batey, I saw Zoom squares flicker as my classmates and me readied ourselves with clenched jaws and determination to allow ourselves to feel, deal, and honor Breonna.

In this section, I explore the ways in which bomba serves as a mode of mitigating colonial and gendered violence on a global scale. Sara Ahmed states that "when you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action; a refusal not to exist until the very end; a refusal not to exist until you do not exist" (2017, 237). In doing the work through ethnographic encounters, I focus on events in Chicago, in the larger United States, Puerto Rico, and again in Mexico. Bomba becomes, as I demonstrate, a transnational balm towards the violences that women must endure.

[102] Ivelisse "Bombera de Corazon" Diaz is La Escuelita's teacher which is based in Chicago.
[103] See Figueroa-Vásquez (2020).

Nothing was solved at the end of the yubá that night. I am not romanticizing or arguing bomba or music as a magical elixir that can solve white supremacy. But I am arguing it is a balm that attends to the cost of an enduring and insufferable history of coloniality[104]. The traditions that survived the plantation and exist in its wake are simultaneously the haunting and the blessingand lend towards fashioning archives of affect that are not only applicable to Afro-Puerto Rican women, but extend beyond and can attend to others' lived experiences[105]. Deborah Thomas reminds us that "archives of affect are technology of deep recognition, they cultivate a sense of mutuality that not only exposes complicity but also demand collective accountability" (2019, 7). And it is through these deeply emotional and affective practices that are passed down through oral traditions and embodied inheritances that attend to both an individual's needs and the larger collective's need for an equitable future.

Some people might write dance off as "cute" or "just for fun," but the last time Puerto Ricans from the island and diaspora came together to dance in front of the governor's mansion, a governor was ousted [106]. Bomba is the dance that helped enslaved people burn it to the ground and escape. This is the dance that stands amongst other Black dances that helped Black women, who endured unfathomable violence, make a home in an unwelcoming nation.

Bomba has a rich historical significance and holds narratives and places of a Black Puerto Rico that canonical Puerto Rican historical texts ignore. Since its inception post-TransAtlantic Slave Trade, bomba has always held an anticolonial and resistant positioning to white supremacy. Whether or not every bomberx is an activist that antagonizes and indicts all forms of violence remains to be seen, but I do know that one cannot learn or participate in bomba without

[104] See Maldonado Torres (2007).
[105] See Sharpe (2016).
[106] See LeBrón and Davila (2019) and also see Chapter 2.

learning that it was born out of resistance. Every bomberx is cognizant of these predatory structures that scaffold their realities. The figuras in my dissertation, along with many other practitioners that are not referenced in this project, do animate their emotional dexterity to condemn global white supremacy and mitigate it's very felt consequences. The summer of 2020 was an example of such a consciousness and serves as more proof that bomba is still in the business of liberating, resisting, and uprising.

As if the COVID-19 pandemic was not enough, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis Police lit the fire on an already gasoline drenched terrain in the United States. The horrific death was captured on video for the entire world to have an instance of state-sanctioned violence at their fingertips. It prompted the outraged community of Minneapolis to gather together in protest of the unlawful killing, which was then met with extreme militarized force. The criminalization of a community standing together left the country with its breath held. Minneapolis did not stop gathering to protest the racism, which prompted further escalation by the police and national guard to establish a military state. As Minneapolis burned, major cities across the United States rose up to meet the need for a strategic show of strength and condemn the continued antiblack racism shown by governing officials and police departments.

My hometown of Chicago was no exception. As I understand from friends in other parts of the country, Chicago was shown by the media as a place plagued by looting, riots, and gang violence during the summer of 2020. Chicago condemned the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery along with Rekia Boyd and Laquan McDonald (killed in 2014 by the Chicago Police Department). Most protestors were young adults and were met with extreme force by the city officials and agents. The tactic of kettling was used by the Chicago Police Department. Kettling is a method of establishing dominance whereby heavily outfitted law

enforcement officers surround groups of people on several sides making sure there is no safe exit or calm outcome. Kettling incites anxiety and fear which can lead to conflict and oftentimes excessive force. Dozens of protestors were met with excessive force and also arrested and charged by the Chicago Police during the Summer 2020 protests. This aggressive show of force to protestors who were lamenting the countless Black lives lost to police departments across the United States incited Chicagoans, and other Americans across the States, even more. Looting began across the country, prompting militarized police and the National Guard to be called in.

The mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, in an effort to appease the businesses in downtown Chicago and on the city's Northside, established a curfew. On May 31st, 2020, the city-wide curfew was activated during a large demonstration downtown and Lightfoot gave only an hour notice. In addition, Lightfoot also raised the bridges leading out of downtown and stopped Chicago public transportation, essentially trapping the protestors with the police in a putitive and violent manner[107]. Dozens were arrested, and as if that were not enough, the mayor then called a stop to Chicago Public Schools' meals. To many, this was punishment for calling out a corrupt system and was a violent extreme that rendered the already vulnerable students of public schools further disadvantaged during a pandemic. As the city of Chicago sprouted local mutual aid groups to make sure the children of Chicago were fed, local business owners held their breath. Business owners were already feeling the financial burden and loss due to the pandemic-induced recession, and then had to mitigate the consequences of outrage. Some business owners understood the reasoning behind the looting as an indictment of the white supremacy that scaffolds this country and not as a personal attack on their businesses. Many protestors rallied and defended their demonstrations, reminding the media and public that

[107] See " Citywide Curfew as Protest continue around Chicago" by LaToya Wright at *chicagodefender.com*, May 2020 (https://chicagodefender.com/citywide-curfew-as-protest-continue-around-chicago/)

"people are more important than property." Understandably, some business owners lamented the ways their businesses were affected due to the uprisings, particularly entrepreneurs of color.

As quiet as it has been kept, Chicago not only suffered from a city-wide curfew, a militarized and aggressively violent police department, looting, and had youth having their meals restricted, Chicago also suffered from intracommunity violence that summer. Local business owners fell back on the city's tried and true method of protection. Soon after the looting ignited downtown and in wealthier Northside areas, the southside and southwestside communities, where Latinxs and Black Americans have long resided, let fear (mixed with the persuasion of the Chicago Police Department) prompt them into relying on neighborhood "race" gangs for protection.

In June 2020, I saw Chicago bomberxs answer a call to action in a moment when tensions in Chicago ran high and anger was being misplaced. As Black and Brown communities turned against each other, practitioners of Black Puerto Rican music used bomba to remind Chicagoans who the real perpetrators of violence in the city had been. Together, with local Latinx and Black organizations, my Chicago-based bomba school began performing at unity demonstrations, just as bomba was being deployed to combat anti-blackness in the States.

At the same time, it seems, in Puerto Rico *bombazos antiracistas* were being deployed to illustrate solidarity with Black people in the States as well as with those in Puerto Rico. One event that comes to mind was organized by Afro-Puerto Ricans in a Facebook Group that I was a member of. On social media, these local organizers planned and executed a demonstration that centered a vigil for George Floyd and connected it to the notable murder of Adolfina Villanueva-Osario. During the demonstration in Loiza, the bomba youth collective *Junte Loiceño* and the feminist music group *Plena Combativa* joined together to refute the widespread state-sanctioned

violence that festered throughout the American empire. Together, *Plena Combativa* played *cuanto mas* (how much more), and a local organizer reminded those present and within the batey that when George Floyd called for his mom, he called out to Black mothers everywhere. Other local organizers remembered the legacy of Adolfina, a Black woman from Loiza who was murdered in 1980 due to a gross land rights confrontation. Wealthy landowners wanted to build a summer home on the land that the Villanueva-Osario family lived on for over 100 years. They arrived at the home with bulldozers, police, and a judge two weeks before the scheduled court date. While Adolfina's children screamed in fear of the confrontation and hid, Adolfina went outside with a machete to lay claim to her family's right to ownership and land. She was shot by the police 16 times in front of her family. Together, bomba honored and connected the murders and the mourning of George Floyd and Adolfina Villanueva-Osario.

Almost immediately after this demonstration, in Canovanas, Julie Laporte and members of *Colectivo Umoja* from southern Puerto Rico came together to show solidarity and encourage a family who, since moving into a gated community housing complex, had been receiving crude and racist drawings depicting their family[108]. The drawings depicted the Black father and his mixed raced daughter, and some of them likened them to monkeys and featured them hanged. Colectivo Umoja created a batey to remind the young girls and father that their blackness was not criminal and that they were not alone. In fact, they were strong like their ancestors before them. Bomba wasn't being used to shame or intimidate perpetrators of racism, but yubá was played to affirm and acknowledge how Afro-Puerto Ricans have historically been and continue to be subjected to instances of antiblack violence. This further concretizes that *bombeando* is care work that need not be pinned to a particular place or time to envelop its practitioners or

[108] One the figuras mentioned in Chapter 2.

those invited into its batey.

In the batey, virtual or not, we honor, we grieve, we heal. We honored Breonna that night. We honored ourselves by actively refusing numbness and allowing ourselves to feel. As we promenaded or did our *paseo básico*, we inevitably imagined our next steps. Therein lies why antiquated colonial powers policed bomba and practices like it. The creativity and bravery required to feel liberated enough to improvise from a vocabulary of figures and movements to the rhythm being played and a feeling that saturates the space is the same creativity that can imagine a solution. "To sing bomba you have to be a time traveler," is what one of my bomba teachers says. So then, can't we travel to the future we want? I see bomba as a space where epiphenomenal time is not only enacted, but the batey and participants within it are dependent upon it. Through the act of bombeando, can't we name ourselves and our ancestors?

All around the imperial States, Black and Brown women are protesting. Whether in the streets or not, our existence is the site of protest. But many people forget that protesting is also care work. For some, protesting against and through colonial time is not only care work but self-care. Yet, it is the daily practices, the old practices that have often been discarded or discounted as modern, that kept colonized subjects alive and helped them endure when only some subjects survive. Oftentimes, these moments of indictment and resistance are marked by thick emotion and music. Music is the fire that defends and honors who we could not protect, but now protect us. Decolonial practices, like refusal and emotional dexterity, lend to the compilation and curation of affective archives, and so, they must be rooted within the body, vibrating throughout surrounding social consciousness and reverberating throughout institutions. As Deborah Thomas reminds us, "archives of affect encourage us to be skeptical about nationalist narratives and to train our vision to transnational geopolitical and sociocultural spheres and messiness of

sovereignty" (2019, 7). These bomberas understand that the places into which history has contained Afro-Puerto Ricans should not and will not contain them any longer, and so they turn to bomba to get, feel, and stay free and teach other women to do the same.

Chapter 4

"*Un belen para los nombrado y los sin nombres*"
(A belen for those named and unnamed):

(Afro)Puerto Rican Women, the Archive, and Historicization[109]

" I want to recuperate their story. I want to return them from the dead and hear their names, learn their lineage. I want them to cease being the silent representative, the main actors, or a stereotype. I want to properly inscribe them into history."

- Hilda Llorens, Imagining the Great Puerto Rican Family

"Don't look at the floor, your ancestors are trying to rise up"

- Ivelisse Diaz, Escuelita de Bombera de Corazón

I missed the noise of the city that smelled like home, like car exhaust and the smoke that curled out from the smokestacks of the factories around the cities. I enlisted after graduating and didn't see how I might support my own family in the near future.

Ken, I wish you didn't have to go[110].

Me either, but the government jobs were quick to ask for applicants and just as quick to fill them, as most recipients were already within the network of government jobs. So, I was lucky. Lucky to leave the states and arrive at the muggy, salt-aired island. I was allegedly even more fortunate to be a part of such a team charged with surveying the island: its people, culture, racial make-up, customs, political infrastructures, work ethic, and propensity for assimilation. The United States wanted no surprises when it came to their latest acquisition. They emphasized that part over and over again to me, how important this census work would be in determining how

[109] A belen is a rhythm of bomba oftentimes played and sang to memorialize a recently deceased.
[110] This chapter starts with critical fabulation as an exercise to illustrate worlds existing in their fullness rather than being restricted by citations. Ken is a vector of the United States government sent to take account of territorial acquisitions, much like the early anthropologists who began developing early area ethnographies and ethnologies on Puerto Rico and were funded by the government. See Mintz (1960, 1974), Mason (1914), Lewis (1966).

many Puerto Ricans would have to move, how much money would have to be invested into the island, how to organize the education system and rearrange it to make sure the students grew to love their island less and their country more[111]. I tried to remember how important this job was. I tried to remember how important I was.

I made sure to tell Shelby that in the letters I sent back, along with the postcards of how the tropics look and the pictures of the ill-dressed and malnourished bunches of children posing in front of the small familial shacks their family shared[112]. I told Shelby of my adventures and the mosquitoes and lizards I'd seen during my initial welcome tour from the office. While lizards, mosquitoes, and these swamp green tree frogs were abundant, my daily working conditions were quite different from the picturesque mailing cards.

Instead, I travelled by motor car and taxi around the island being driven by Black and mulatto drivers[113]. I had been told by my superiors that the area I was working in was said to be particularly dangerous. The neighborhoods had *buena gente* (good people) whose families helped establish the area by bringing their generation's enterprises to Puerto Rico, but by the same token, the remnants of such legacies remained visible on the outskirts of Carolina, particularly in Hoyo Mula[114]. A large amount of Black and mixed raced Puerto Ricans entangled

---

[111] Soon after occupation, the United States ushered the school system in Puerto Rico with young educators from the states and redeveloped Puerto Rican public school curriculum in order to redefine the limits and expectations of how to be a productive citizen within the United States Empire. Consequently, in "From la bomba to Beisbol" Parks (2011) highlights the ways that baseball or physical education was used to teach nationalism and bomba was used as a semiotic that would shadow Puerto Rico's untamable Black legacies in what would be a sanitized representation of blackness.

[112] To perform imperial tenacity, sophistication, and expansion the United States like many other colonial powerhouses began a campaign to create and circulate postcards that surveyed the archipelago and centered the Puerto Rico within the tropic and also within tropical paradise. In *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family,* Hilda Lloréns (2014) does a visual ethnographic study of the ways in which these post cards functioned as a technological intervention of American imperialism through race-ing Puerto Rico and by perpetuating the narrative that Puerto Ricans were in need of civility.

[113] This is information given to me by bomberas who discussed that the majority of ancestral bomberos who did not do seasonal jobs, gained wages as drivers. (Maldonado-Diaz, Melanie. Interview. 10/9/2019)

[114] Countless times, I've heard the term "buena gente" in terms of neighborhoods (in Puerto Rico and in the States)

in all facets of life on the island, and as I had been learning in Carolina. The area used to be home to over a dozen plantations, and since the abolition of slavery, the descendants of the enslaved people have continued to seek jobs and reside in the area[115].

I quickly noted and learned that Puerto Rico could never be as organized as the States. Like our other insular oceanic "acquisitions" (i.e., Guam, Hawaii, Virgin Islands),[116] the native[117] populations were difficult to distinguish from one another. It is hard to note who are the original occupants versus who might be migrants. Unlike in the US where it is easier to see who is white and who is Black, many are not white and some of those who appear white still have prominent African ancestry[118]. This makes my job increasingly complicated. As I walk up and down the cobblestone neighborhoods, I notice the running children, the hurried wives, and the domestics concentrated on their tasks and a million miles away at the same time. I walk up to so many houses that I stop noticing the quality of their construction, they all seem to blend together after a while: the country or the out-the-way wooden homes with linoleum roofs and the well-kept communities of freshly constructed homes. My brow always furrowed at the suspicion or adoration of being deemed important enough to be counted.

---

willingly given to residential areas where most of its inhabitants are white or light skinned.

[115] According to the FPRN (Fernando Pico Research Notes / Archive), many of the Black people in the area shared the same family names as those who throughout the consecutive censuses were plantation owners from that very same area. Rosa Carasquillo in *Our Landless Patria* (2006) describes the ways in which land rights and inheritance in Puerto Rico were the material legacies of enslavement. Just as in the United States, a system of sharecropping was put in place in Puerto Rico that ultimately led to descendants of enslaved peoples living on the land their families once worked.

[116] Hawaii was occupied by the United States in 1893. Guam, like Puerto Rico, was conceded as a result of the Spanish American War in 1898. The U.S. Virgin Islands were purchased in 1917 by the United States.

[117] Native is used here to denote those Indigenous to Puerto Rico, rather than those who might have been living on the archipelago during occupation and who hail from other places.

[118] While some early ethnographers took up the question of race in Puerto Rico as a mixed-race society (See Mintz (1960; 1980) and Barton (1995)), others like Lewis (1966) deemed Puerto Rico as a nation with no ties to blackness ignoring its distinct destination in the geography of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This makes the turn towards studies of blackness (as mentioned in the introduction) that much more pertinent as contemporary scholars are trying to undo the canonized silencing of Afro-Puerto Ricans, this type of intellectual excavation is similar to how Black historians are trying to breathe life back into the lives cemented in death and violence within colonial records.

I'd write down the residents' answers verbatim, as required by my job, no matter how outlandish I thought them to be. *Gente de color,* or colored people, sometimes named themselves white and I had to mark them down as such[119].

I thought after traveling and surveying several different towns, I would no longer be surprised. That is until I met Concepción.

******

As the white man came up to the house, Concepción rustled to wash her hands of the sweet peppers, garlic, onions, and herbs she was mashing together with a pestle[120]. She patted her hands and told her *señora* as the man approached. Donning a starched, crisp light shirt with a hat to protect his face that was obviously not used to the Caribbean sun, he looked around making noise, waiting for (if not demanding) for someone to answer the door. Concepción hurried, even though Enrique was not home. He would not have liked hearing about some man being loud outside his house. She watched closely, turning off the flame and halting all kitchen activities to supervise his inquisition. Ken asked about who lived in the home, where were they from, did her señora know how to read and write? Where was Enrique? He wanted to know how long señora was married to him. He saw her señora and her light porcelain skin—beginning to crack from travel and Enrique's temper—and said that is not your mother. Who is the old woman? Then, he stared at Concepción and reckoned that he need not ask the racial categorizing question. Her existence stood as strong as the freshly mashed garlic. He directed his line of questioning to her.

[119] I will discuss Jay Kinsbruner (1996) and their discussion of how being "of color" in Puerto Rico largely sculpted life in early Puerto Rico through limitations and shame. More than that, in my own personal genealogical research, along with other Puerto Rican intellectuals who have worked with census records, the act of an individual naming themselves as white when they do not experience life, the power, or the privilege of a white individual is a result of white supremacist ideologies taking root. By naming themselves white, they are naming themselves someone of value, someone to be respected, someone who has a work ethic. This rings true particularly during this time when Black Puerto Ricans were being depicted as lacking work ethic, unsanitary, and uncivilized.

[120] This type of pestle is also known as a pilón in Puerto Rico.

"Where are you from, can you read, where is your man—if you even have one[121]?"

Concepción told him she was a widow. She didn't tell him that her love had gotten her through everything that led her to that moment, or about his hands that held her, the callouses on them thicker than ones one on her own hands, each one like a ring on the trunk of a tree marking time, space, and memory. She was his and he was hers and those before did not matter. Señora helped her marry him and kept them together despite Enrique and his temper and devilish hands. The hands that were always wet with the sweat and fever that drives men to drive other men. Enrique was just too slick. Concepción's stomach began to turn, and she curtly said, "I cannot read."

The man gulped all of the *agua de coco* she brought him, and again asked her, "Where are you from? Your mom? How old are you, *vieja* (old woman)?" She sighed—she knew these white men, now a different tongue than the island before, but always the same questions and looks. The same lack of respect for her, her privacy, her story. Concepción said, "I am 81 years old, and I was born in the ocean." *Nació en el mar*. The man stared at her and wrote whatever he was going to write quickly and with a flourish. He figured she was just confused, and she must have been born in Santa Cruz[122] or on of the *islitas*[123]. But he knew she had to have been a slave. Her skin told him enough to know that. Concepción was lucky her señora and Enrique still took care of her for so long.

Concepción felt lucky, but feelings are fleeting. They come and go like tides, like memories. But histories stay and hers belonged to her, she thought as the man shuffled to the next house,

---

[121] In the FPRN collection, even if the *criada* or domestic worker is not a live-in employee, her census information is recorded under her employers'. This type of documentation echoes the colonial violence that leaves Black women and Black families disarticulated as entities worthy of existing as whole. In working with the collection, a number of Black women were found under the entries for white men and did not have their own separate entry.

[122] St. Croix in English.

[123] *Las islitas* are how Puerto Ricans colloquially might refer to islands located within the minor Antilles.

surely demanding more and more of the women of Hoyo Mula[124]. Men are always demanding. She would have to empty the chamber pot and wash the surrounding area soon[125]. She grew tired of his measured and exacting looks. She began cleaning the area he seemed to have settled his weight into, and he caught the hint.

As Ken walked to the next *finca*, he felt Concepción's judging eyes linger on him. He felt the sweat rolling down his back and pooling on the arch of his lower back, seeping through his thin shirt that was now sticking to his skin rather than being light and breathable as Shelby promised it would be when she got his clothes ready for him. A young beautiful face answered the door and led him to a table and chair. Her name was Catalina Severa Sanjurjo Gonzalez, and she was remarkable. The cinnamon dusted girl, who would no doubt develop into a beauty, busied herself making him refreshments. He asked where her dad was, and she kindly said this was not her dad's house. Her señora would be back from the *lavandera*'s (laundress') house soon.

He asked her if she could read or write and how old she was. Catalina smiled. She knew if she didn't smile, she would never hear the end of it. He looked eager to drink the *jugo de parcha* (passionfruit juice), she just hoped he didn't break the glass she was letting him use. Señora would definitely have Catalina stay the weekend and make up for it, but there was a *baile* (dance) happening that her sister Elena, who worked two houses down, said she would let her tag

[124] A neighborhood in Carolina, Puerto Rico

[125] The chamber pot maid might prompt connections to Victorian iconography, however it is important to realize that in plantocracies this was a position associated with enslavement. In Puerto Rico, most historiographies concerned with life during the period of enslavement have the tendency to place slavery within the archipelago in the countryside or even in certain regions with a higher reporting of Afro-descended peoples. To pretend that slavery was tethered to the mountainside is inaccurate and studies that perpetuate this inaccuracy does present day Afro-Puerto Ricans a disservice. Isar Godreau (2015) highlights how the emphasis on slavery happening in the countryside or coastal area furthers the notion that it is an African ancestry that places Puerto Rican within the Afro-Atlantic experience rather than the living and breathing Black Puerto Ricans. This mirrors the geographical limitations placed on bomba as only having been performed on plantations. Mariano Negron-Portillo emphasizes that these urban forms of slavery, including criadas or chambermaids, did exist and in fact thrived in San Juan (and surrounding areas) as it became a frequented Caribbean port city (La esclavitus urbana en San Juan, 1992).

along to. Her mom wouldn't be there this weekend as she was traveling to visit her *Titi*. Finally, she could go hear the *barriles* up close and see her sister sing and dance with the man she was convinced was going to marry her. Catalina just wanted to be outside and not working for one weekend, and the truth is she missed her sister. She was excited for Elena to let her use the *enaguas* that she had been saving and making with their grandmother and aunts. Catalina saw the hours that Elena devoted to learning from how the women in their family passed down knowledge through nimble fingers and the weaving of needles and memories[126]. The *mundillo* Elena always showed off on her enaguas at *bombazos* always won her compliments and favor of the prominent *bomberos* and *bomberas* in Puerto Rico. Catalina wanted to eagerly walk in that same legacy of fabric and favor.

Ken asked her how old she was, and she told him proudly, "I just turned twelve." He said she had to be older, she was so mature. Catalina rolled her eyes when he wasn't looking, thinking about how that is what Señora said about her lately, as well as the men who played dominoes with her father. Everyone focused on her body that was tucked behind fabric. Her mother told her that at work, she should hide the ways her thighs were beginning to spread out at her sides and her back was starting to bend like a branch of a tree heavy with *plátanos*.

She asked him if he wanted anything else to drink, but he almost missed her question as she dazzled him with how she looked so regal in her humble attire. He grabbed her arm to say yes. He did not want to miss another word she said and watched her mouth for more sentences and

[126] Textiles have a long-established historical proximity and significance with Puerto Rican women, in fact in Gendered Geographies in Puerto Rican Culture: Spaces, Sexualities, and Solidarities (2016) by Radost Rangelova one of the most frequent sites that Puerto Rican women were found in literary works. Furthermore, Puerto Rican lace work or *mundillo* was a trade that many Afro-Puerto Rican women were contracted or sought out for. In an interview Melanie Maldonado Diaz (10/12/2019) said that mundillo and textiles in general was historically a large part of the women's participation in bomba. The *enagua* or petticoat was worn under skirts and were showed off to display the women's collection or skill, some women even changed enaguas between dances. The cultural emphasis on Puerto Rican textiles has since lessened, however in some families like Brenda Figueroa-Torres', Afro-Puerto Rican women are going the extra mile to maintain such traditions.

her body twitched as she flinched under his touch. Her señora walked in the house and began asking her who this man was. Catalina did not move and began answering almost intuitively, just as Ken said he was a government official. Señora said Catalina could go back to washing dishes outside. Catalina just stared at the water hoping it would heat itself, feeling like she got caught not doing a chore the proper way as she often did when she first began working for her Señora. She walked outside and watched her Señora rush him out the door.

She stared at the water a lot that weekend since Señora insisted she stayed working to make up for the time she spent fraternizing with the government official. Her sister Elena came to visit her while she was washing and told her about how wonderful the dance was before the police came to stop it. She wasn't sure how the police found out about the *baile de bomba*, as they had only circulated its happening through the typical channels of friends and families around the island and raising a blue *panuelo* for those in the area to be made aware[127]. Either way, since the dance did not have a permit, Elena and her friends now had to pool their money to pay the fine. Catalina listened and then began crying as she told her sister about the *escandolo* that happened.

Apparently, Enrique yelled at his wife in the street, accusing her of running a brothel and being unfaithful to him. He was drunk and this had happened before. That house was always loud with crashing and scandals. But this time, Enrique had a pistol and shot at her[128]. He didn't hit her, but the police were called to Carolina. Of course, the men sorted it out amongst themselves and apparently, they asked Enrique's wife about whether or not she wanted him

[127] This detail–the blue fabric being hung like a banner–is one gathered through Melanie Maldonado Diaz' National Bomba Research Conference organizing. To avoid the financial burdens of paying for permits to *bombear,* bomberxs would keep their intention to hold *bailes de bomba* within their own communities.

[128] Violence against women has permeated Puerto Rican society since as far back as the archive goes and continues up until today as a State of Emergency has been declared in Puerto Rico to combat gender violence. The main issue as seen through the record and documented in contemporary discourse is that when people do attempt to report instances of gender violence there is no type of protection or structures in place to support women. In fact, police officers tend to be perpetrators of intimate partner violence themselves.

arrested. Of course, she said no. If Enrique was thrown in jail, how would she survive and who would pay the bills? Surely the courts and church would not grant her a divorce. So, when the police came and left without Enrique, they heard the bomba drums and made sure to put an end to what they thought of as noise.

It was just too much to hear. Catalina's eyes welled up and ran into the dishwater as she tried to understand how Enrique's wife or Concepción manage.

I use this iteration in the archive to shift the landscape of the historical trajectory of Puerto Rico by centering bomberas in a period that is seldom discussed: post-emancipation but pre-Operation Bootstrap. Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) positions feminism as an archive of unhappiness, or willfulness. In fact, she argues that "a feminist history is affective; we pick up those feelings that are not supposed to be felt because they get in the way of an expectation of who we are and what life should be" (66). In this chapter, and in my larger project, I seek out instances in the recorded archive and contemporarily where Afro-Puerto Rican women sidestep the colonial expectation of who they should or should not be. In doing so, I am also centering other Afro-Puerto Rican women who did not practice *bomba* because my project emphasizes bomba as a site and method used to articulate affective archives and the poetics and aesthetics of Black Latinx dexterous refusal under colonial time.

Ayudame Ayudarte : **Critical Fabulation and Bombeando through the Archive**

In bomba, if a dancer is dancing and putting together not only impressive figures, but also prompts the principal drummer—the *primo*—to riff over the bass rhythm in ways that beckon to the singers and observers, you might hear ¡*Habla*!, as in "speak."

In the *batey*, people are speaking, and bomba is the language. It is a conversation that

everyone inside the batey, and even outside of the batey who are looking on, are a part of. One of my teachers frequently reminds her beginning and intermediate bomba dance students that at bombazos, dancers must be mindful not only of the elements happening within the batey but must be considerate to the persons around the batey who might want to participate in its conversations. This discursive anecdote of speaking while dancing in the batey aligns with bomba and more broadly dance serving as a form not only of entertainment, but also nonverbal communication[129]. "I can't wait to see the stories you tell," is something that the same teacher once told me, and while she was referring to me dancing in the batey, I think about the stories I want to tell and the stories I found when combing through Fernando Pico's archive.

The data set is ripped from floppy diskettes that held Fernando Pico's personal notes during his project on the area of Carolina and its surrounding towns in Puerto Rico. In a PDF, the information was already scanned from typewritten documents and the colonial handwriting of censuses and police reports were already deciphered. However, due to the ever changing and unstable archive in Puerto Rico, I couldn't be too sure if hard copies of these documents still existed on the island. Not only are records oftentimes held in the States, but also environmental catastrophes and ever-changing political parties erase them.

This has been the most difficult chapter to complete and in fact many people thought I set out to do the impossible: to imagine how enslaved and post-emancipation Black women and women of color might have felt[130]. While my conviction and determination led me to not share that concern, it was when Francisco Scarano, my undergraduate mentor, gifted me access to the

[129] Here I am thinking of Fiona Buckland's argument of dance as a nonverbal communication as well as the meanings that dance might take up in other cultures.

[130] While "women of color" and "people of color" have taken on particular meanings within various social discourses, i.e., to refer to marginalized groups of people in the Americas, the term was originally coined to indicate Black descent in the Caribbean.

Fernando Pico Collection that I knew I was meant to do this[131]. I had to study the names and the stories to see what Dr. Pico might have overlooked. But, as I compiled data and made charts and saw the stories staring back at me that weren't yet written or that hadn't been spoken in ages, I became overwhelmed and frustrated. I had planned to seek out connections to bomba in the archive and the women who might have danced it, but as I found myself staring at numbers and names, trying to make a life out of them, I realized that is not enough.

I set out to learn more about the enslaved women who danced bomba and how they might have felt in a world that ignored their feelings. I set out to learn more about how Black music, and more pointedly, spaces that Jessica Johnson would argue were within geographies of Black femme freedom, were surveilled and policed. Johnson (2020, 170) argues that Black femme freedom describes the aesthetics and embodiment of practices enacted by African and African-descended women and girls who created space to seek safety for themselves and kin and to claim ownership of themselves. In this chapter and project more generally, I argue that bomba is plotted within the geographies that make up Black femme freedom in Puerto Rican history and contemporary Puerto Rican society. The Pico Collection allowed me a glimpse, along with other historical Puerto Rican works, of how Black femininity in Puerto Rico was positioned.

In the Pico Collection, "baile" is found 80 times, of which it is mentioned 45 times in association with police being called or summoned to the dances which were attended by Black Puerto Ricans. Due to the neighborhood and location, we can assume these dances and

[131] The Fernando Pico Collection is a (soon to exist) collection of the infamous Puerto Rican historian Dr. Fernando Pico's research materials. Pico is most known for his detailed surveying of Puerto Rico's municipalities. The material I worked with were more than 1,000 pages of mini profiles compiled from census data, newspapers, police reports, baptism records, and funeral rites. Pico used this data to write what would become the published book *San Fernando de La Carolina* (2005), however, some of the original archival materials he referenced are no longer available. The municipality deems most references "lost," making Pico's extremely detailed notes incredibly important to Puerto Rican history.

gatherings were bailes de bomba. Fifteen permits were requested to hold a baile, and two instances of people being fined for not having a permit were found in my inquiries[132]. This offers insights into the extent to which the state imposed on the intimate spaces of Black life. Even patios and homes were not outside of colonial governance during enslavement and early emancipation. This imperial intimate violence, as Johnson (2020) names it, "construct[s] [Black women] in law and official discourse as objects of use, possession and sexual infiltration" (166). This violence "saturated the Black women's encounters in the bedrooms they slept in, the fields they labored in, on the streets they walked and on the waterways that cut through town" (Johnson 2020, 166). Due to the pervasive nature of imperial violence, I chose to not replicate my findings in a structure similar to the one I used at the beginning of this paragraph to discuss the policing of bomba, Black music, and dance in Puerto Rico, and ultimately spaces of Black fugitivity where Black practices of freedom could exist outside of the scope of the colonial gaze. The mere three sentences of conclusions do not do justice to the people who make up those instances, the people who attended those dances, and more importantly the people outside of the record, nowhere to be found within my data set, who also attended dances.

In this chapter, I follow my measured and metered imagination, much like Saidiya Hartman suggests in "Venus in Two Acts" (2008) and accomplishes in Wayward Lives (2019), to push the reader past the positivist values that are printed out on pages of paper. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman undertakes the labor of lifting up the lives of Black women in Harlem during the early mid-1900s. Hartman's urban historical retelling of Black women is made from the remnants of their lives that she found in the archive, requiring her to

[132] This is according to the Fernando Pico Research Notes, which contain police records so the information might be biased. There is a very good chance that there were even more undiscovered or uncited *bailes de bomba* than what the FPRN have recorded.

perform her intervention of "critical fabulation" (2008) to take names, dead ends, and pictures within minimal distinguishable information and put them into context with other sources in order to construct a more robust entry for those women in the archive. Critical fabulation is another way of contesting muted or silenced histories (Trouillot 1995) through creative labor.

I found in writing this chapter that critical fabulation is much like the creativity required of a bombera within the batey[133]. A dancer is taught a number of *figuras* or movements, or even movement sequences, along with basic promenades for the different rhythms and then must call upon them. As a dancer calls upon them, they must keep in mind the timing of their proposed movements, the tempo, and how to signal changes or breaks in their sequences to the drummer who marks their movements with percussion. Just as a historian must respect the limits of the data, a bombera must respect the rhythm and timing of a song.

In working alongside bomberxs and seeing their method of historicizing, which I detail and model later on in this chapter, I knew that the facts were concrete and new within Puerto Rican historical studies, but they were not what moved me away from my computer when I set out to start this chapter several times before[134]. The facts made me cringe, the sterile stinging record sent me back to Marisa Fuentes (2016) and to Saidiya Hartman (2007) and pushed me towards Jessica Johnson (2020) and Lorgia García-Peña (2016). In this chapter, I join care and historicity in my analytical findings of the Fernando Pico Collection. I move past the facts presented in typeface and join Hartman, Fuentes, Johnson, and García-Peña in seeing past the limits of the page and meticulously crafting the world that shaped the experiences of Black Puerto Rican

[133] I am making use of Hartman's critical fabulation intervention outlined in her article "Venus in Two Acts." Scholars of Black life must look at the archive to see past the documented violences and deaths and see what colonial agents did not want to capture–Black life. It's an act of measured fabulation.

[134] I am using "bomberx" to include practitioners who do not identify within the gender binary, while I focus on women and femmes mostly, I was able to learn, practice, and be at bombazos with practitioners who prefer this conjugation and as a way to not erase that I am choosing to write about general practitioners this way.

women. Most records documenting the Spanish colonial period in Puerto Rico execute the same violent silence concerning the ways Black women made lives that defied the goal of assimilation and conquest. These Black femme experiences have been flattened through the archival investment in empire and the silencing of defiance, however during my ethnographic field research I noticed that there is a re-energized investment in the legacies of women within bomba.

Bomba is the oldest genre of music and oral-based tradition there is in the Puerto Rican archipelago. Scholars who are seriously invested in Black femme life that precedes and evades imperial surveillance should sift through the embodied, aesthetic, and vast epistemologies at work in the genre. I join the members of the bomberx community who are cemented in the tradition of preserving memories of Afro-Puerto Rican ancestors who succeeded and living and dying free outside of the enduring colonial record. I was a participant-observer during the 8th National Bomba Research Conference in Puerto Rico. I was invited to present preliminary archival research on bomberas in the archive alongside two other bomba scholars before the first night of the conference ended with a bombazo. There I witnessed the community-based historicizing in the wake of diasporic *destierro* or an embodied uprootedness that mirrors the care that Hartman states undergirds her historical methodological intervention of critical fabulation[135]. These Puerto Rican bomberxs deploy the very limited resources at their disposal to prompt worldmaking that centers Afro-Puerto Rican life. This perspective is vastly different from what has been typical of Puerto Rican studies. More than shifting the linear trajectory and landscape of Puerto Rican history, the bomberxs are stitching together an intellectual framing that places bomba at the nexus of Black studies discourse, memory studies, and studies of

[135] Here I am thinking about Yomaira Figueroa's elaboration on the concept of destierro which becomes more central in my analysis in other chapters, describing the ways dislocation and uprootedness occur within migration and become by in part of diaspora. Figueroa, Yomaira. 2020. "After the Hurricane: Afro-Latina Decolonial Feminisms and Destierro." *Hypatia* 35 (Winter): 220–29.

embodiment. Such projects emerge in the citational and physical spaces that they organize, like the National Bomba Research Conference put on by the Puerto Rican Organization of the Performing Arts (PROPA).

Bomba's oral tradition makes knowledge difficult to record and trace but determined bomberxs continue to preserve stories that otherwise would not have been told and retold in canonical texts. They include stories of refusal, resistance, resilience, and preservation. Thus, I privilege oral tradition in this chapter, and in earlier chapters I have pointed to embodied physical knowledge, such as piquetes, figuras, or different stances and postures, to posit that *mayores*, or elders, become a foregrounding force within bomba. In this way, the batey and the mayores within bomba propel it to continue to exist as atemporal Black practice that deviates from the Western sense of the past[136]. I lean into the methodological processes adapted by bomberxs. These processes include coupling songs with now public censuses in ancestry databases and other historical sources (e.g., old newspapers or interviewing elders). I aim to mirror the ways bomba practitioners use this knowledge to reimagine the worlds that their ancestors lived in, that bomba songs reference, and to understand how bomba survived.

Furthermore, in this chapter I privilege the worlds inhabited by Afro-Puerto Rican women, whether in the Fernando Pico Research Notes or how songs have come to be written and popularized within the tradition. Afro-Puerto Rican women's lives are seldomly preserved or projected in their fullness in archival documents. However, even more scarce are lives of bomberas. Likewise, when pivoting away from Western senses of knowing and archival sources towards what Diana Taylor (2003) calls the repertoire, bomberas are still tethered to men or being reduced to an ornamental figure in academic texts, oral histories, and in song.

---

[136] I am thinking explicitly about Michel Rolph Troulliot in *Silencing the Past* (1995) describes how the past or historicity is often different from the history that is amplified via colonial or official texts.

In my attempts to answer the question Saidiya Hartman posits so earnestly, "Who are these stories for? For us or for them?" I tarry between the two, not to give voice, but to respect and care for the known and unknown that bomba holds and points to. Through Concepción and Catalina, I use beauty to provide an antidote to dishonor that plagues Black women, enslaved and free, in the archive (Hartman 2008, 3). My intention is an excavation of bomberas by prioritizing the historical positionings of Afro-Puerto Rican women and also making clear how bomberas were integral to the history of bomba, and by proxy, to the history of Puerto Rico.

Cimarrona: **Caring about Concepción and Catalina**

> "It is said that if you look at the sea long enough, scenes from the past come back to life.' It is said that 'the sea is history.' And 'the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave'."
>
> - Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (2008, 176)

There are named and unnamed Black women in the archive, but the important thing to remember is there are Black women who exist or evade or refuse even the absolute archive. Concepción is a woman in the Pico Collection but Catalina's name nods to several young Black domestic workers, or *criadas,* within the collection. Still, there are women who are not etched forever in history and instead exist in someone's or some place's memory. Catalina is a name that is typical to refer to a woman in bomba. Much like Fulana in Puerto Rico stands in for "whats-her-name" or "that girl," Catalina has been used in songs as a placeholder. In this chapter, Catalina is linked to several girls but also is a placeholder for the women whose existence refused the colonial gaze.

Concepción was 81 years old at the time of the 1920 census, and her race was not listed[137].

[137] However, in the public accessible slave registry documents of 1872 in the surrounding areas to Carolina like

She was in the house of Enrique, was widowed, and answered, "Yo nació en el mar." I was born in the ocean, I was born at sea. In the Caribbean that could mean a number of things. It could mean you have moved between the Caribbean's many islands so much that the sea was home, or it could mean you were born on a ship. "I was born in the ocean," from a woman who lived during slavery and who's skin color exceeded pigmentocracy said everything to me. I was born in the ocean, no home or memory of it. Alternatively, any memory of home is not yours to have, so the ocean is what you can have. Concepción's answer was an act of refusal (Simpson 2014) made by a most likely enslaved woman who had been recorded in slave registries and had experienced life under the many gazes of coloniality who wanted to remove herself from the narrative in that moment.[138]

The Pico Collection seldom names enslaved women. Enslaved women often appear in the following sentence structure: *señor* [name] owns x # of *esclavas*. In fact, this formula appears in the collection 39 times, referencing 105 women and girls who are never named. The remaining 51 times that "esclava" appears are next to names in baptisms and death rites.[139] These women are cemented in subjugation and death in the record. However, Concepción lived through it and refused. Her defiance to giving a straightforward answer granted her the agency to present

Carolina or where many of the migrants from the French Caribbean had relocated to the Western part of the island have two different women whose enslaver had the same family name as Enrique and within the appropriate age range.

[138] This census in particular was that of 1920, after the U.S. occupation and Spanish prompting emancipation in Puerto Rico. While Hoyo Mula and its surrounding areas were surveyed within the Fernando Pico archive, there were two different Concepcions within the slave registry of 1872 owned by a family whose surname was Gonzalez. Both Concepcion's were the right age meaning they were between 20-30 years old at the time they appear in the slave registry and then 81 years old during the 1920 census.

[139] These are no doubt a part of the church records that Fernando Pico analyzed. It should be noted that many of these records, if not moved physically or by environmental episodic circumstances, are digitized by alleged efforts to make Puerto Rican archival documents easier to access. It is important to note that even within church records the ledgers for black baptisms were separate from white baptisms, as well as enslaved baptisms from free baptisms.

herself as she saw fit[140].

I emphasize this not to romanticize Concepción but to emphasize the likelihood that many of the numbered and unnamed women in the collection may have lived past emancipation in 1872 and the mandated work period (i.e., an extension of enslavement) that recently emancipated persons owed their previous owners. After that, as Jay Kinsbruner states, "Prejudice, whether racially or ethnically inspired, had become internalized in the Puerto Rican psyche to the point that it was acted out in normal intergroup relations. Prejudice had become normative" (1996, 35)[141]. Puerto Rico held tight the memory of slavery and continued to elevate whiteness. Oftentimes, accusing people who passed as white, of being of color or de color, was to suggest a denigration of that family's blood and honor. More than that, Puerto Rican society championed whiteness as a matter of propriety and decency. These concepts depend on the violence that taints both the archive and enslaved women's existence, and continues to haunt Afro-Puerto Rican women, free or not so free. Concepción, however, was refusing as much as she could to aid in a colonial project of measuring and numbering migrants and Black women.

Mujeres, ya no tienen que llorar: Black life despite terror

"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5

[140] Here I am thinking about refusal in the terms of Audra Simpson (2014: 11) and Deborah Thomas (2019:212) particularly when Thomas says "repair, like refusal is practice-oriented and quotidian, it is non-eventful and deeply historical and relational" and how this works in tandem with a direct quote used within the census from a Concepcion.

[141]Here, I want to highlight again as I did earlier in this chapter, that race in Puerto Rico does not function as it does in the United States, there is a greater emphasis on a Black and white binary than there is in Latin America (see the *Afro-Latin@ Reader* 2010). This is not to say that Puerto Rico is free from antiblackness dictating the ways in which Puerto Rico is structured. Kinsbruner, in his historiography, argues and demonstrates how "people of color" was initially meant to limit individual's participation in society and rights as citizens due to their proximity to slavery or blackness during the time of Spanish rule in Puerto Rico. These initial conflicts and disputes that resulted in litigation around whether mixed raced people were actually mixed raced and whether or not they could run for office are an example of how a pervasive white supremacist logic begins to take root and become concretized through institutions.

The Fernando Pico Collection says next to nothing about enslaved women and their lives forthrightly. I turn to CT Overman's book-length study (1975) on a sugar plantation called "La Enriqueta" in Guayama, Puerto Rico. Overman uses letters, newspapers, diaries, and ledgers in his attempts to reconstruct what life could have looked like for both the colonial elite and their slaves[142]. He mentions that shortly after the Haitian revolution, there were many insurgencies spanning across the island, but they did not pass over Guayama. There was a rather large, planned uprising involving several plantations' enslaved people, including a handful of women who used bomba as a ruse to gather and plot their rebellion. The conspirators were caught and while the men were sentenced to either death, hard labor, or a lifetime of enslavement, all but one of the women were sentenced to the latter. Women, while often relegated to the lowest rank in society, were both the most vulnerable and valuable to the institution of slavery. They were stripped of their personhood and forced to live out their lives in objecthood. But, they were incredibly important to the (re)production of enslavement through their very ability to (re)produce the next generation of an enslaved labor force. This meant a lifetime of objecthood, unless they escaped, but mostly, it guaranteed that their children would also be enslaved[143]. More than that, it reinforces that the Transatlantic human slave trade was not only an economic venture in cash crops but was also a systemic network of human trafficking and sex trafficking that resulted in the capital that established "the West" as formidable.

I want to return to the act of Concepción's refusal within the Fernando Pico Collection

[142] Overman not only describes the instances of the revolts that happened at *La Enriqueta* and surrounding plantations but the capitalist ventures that resulted in the Overman family to settle in Puerto Rico. In a way, Overman presents a glimpse at the intricacies of life as a settler in the Caribbean and the ways in which plantations were business enterprises to the colonial elite.

[143] Partus sequitir ventrem was a law enacted to discourage interracial relations and children, extending the status of the mother to the child. Particularly, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," by Hortense Spillers (1987) fully articulates how this law placed the burden of enslaved status on the Black woman. This effectively ungendered Black women and solidified Black women as the basis on capitalism.

and why it is so significant. Afro-Puerto Rican women who had refused to further the colonial state (or plantocracy before) were subject to punishment. These violent punishments are made spectacular in the historical record and many scholastic endeavors detailing the histories of slavery. What I find remarkable is that the most common punishment for women was to be known forever as a slave. But then what? What if emancipation ended their sentences? What position would they find themselves in? The only difference between the labor that Concepción was performing pre-emancipation and during the 1920 census was a wage. However, her refusal was one that was embodied and learned and while it might not be a refusal that resulted in the burning of a plantation, it was one that cemented her opacity in history outside of the colonial requisite of transparency.

Intimate imperial violence is what beckons forth the perpetuation and reality of colonialism's monstrous intimacies[144]. The sinister predatory nature that is interlinked to white supremacy has subjected Black women in Puerto Rico not only into objecthood but made them fungible within society. Concepción speaks of Enrique's devilish hands and that was also in the archive if you look clearly enough. Enrique Cabezas Gonzalez was a white man, probably *criollo*, who inherited the privilege of entitlement and greed[145]. He is not only listed in the census information where I found Concepción's act of refusal, but also within police records. Enrique attempted to shoot his wife after beating her violently. While his wife was a white woman and educated, white supremacy enabled Enrique's patriarchal violence and permeated her life as well. White supremacy is made whole by capitalism, patriarchal violence, and anti-blackness.

---

[144] Christina Sharpe names the "fundamental violence, of multiple subjections, the tolerance for and the necessity of them within the spaces and the forms of intimacy," *Monstrous Intimacies* (p. 2).

[145] Criollo is understood in Puerto Rico as a white privileged man, probably of European descent, born in Puerto Rico. While criollo might phonetically sound like creole, understood in the States and other parts of the Caribbean as being or referring to a racial and cultural mixture, criollo in Puerto Rico means of Puerto Rico, or created in Puerto Rico.

And if it found Enrique's wife, it undoubtedly found Concepción.

Black women who were domestic workers have long been studied by scholars of the United States, most notably as the archetypal figure that both slavery and Hollywood concretized into the mammy[146]. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that the inhumane treatment of Black domestic workers was romanticized and reimagined into fiction about Black enslaved women who were wet nurses and cooks. Partly as an attempt to settle the nerves of wives who knew how their men prowled, the mammy figure emerged and took on a life of its own. However, the role of the criada remains under-investigated in Puerto Rican studies, much like Afro-Puerto Rican women's lives in general. The Pico Collection held many domestic workers – Black, of color, and white – and what I find so striking and hold in tension with the bodies of literature which analyze the mammy figure, is that so many domestic workers were young girls. There was a girl as young as 7 and several who were 11, 12, 13 listed as criadas. This is not surprising, particularly as the Pico Collection reflects the change in colonial governance from Spain to the United States. This longitudinal survey of information includes pertinent information as Puerto Rico began the transformation to being a U.S. territory, but also the years prior to and after emancipation. This is not only evident in how the mammy image began to appear in Puerto Rico (which had already circulated through the United States by way of advertising and popular culture), but also in the literacy and enrollment rate in public schools. Many of the women of color criadas in the Pico Collection were illiterate, but particularly these younger girls were not

[146] The mammy figure has extensive literature written about it. Some notable references to it within mainstream advertising would be Aunt Jemima, or even within Puerto Rican advertising the famous figure of Mama Ines. Afro-Puerto Rican scholar, Maria Rivera Quinoñes (2011 writes more about Mama Ínes from a Puerto Rican sociocultural perspective. Within bomba scholarship, Melanie Maldonado describes the similarities between folkloric bombera costumes and that of the mammy figures in media. Ironically enough, traditional bomba attire or "costume" were not like what we see today. There were no long skirts, with elaborate ruffles, instead there were more elaborate slips underneath the skirts, which were shorter. For more on realistic bomba costumes and textiles see the work of Melanie Maldonado Diaz.

enrolled in school, which would have guaranteed their ability to effectively read and write in Spanish or English[147].

Figueroa-Vásquez (2020) begins to articulate the intricacies of the lives of criadas within the hispanophone Caribbean in *Decolonizing Diasporas*, through a character named Belicia in Junot Diaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. While Figueroa-Vásquez' work takes up literature to suggest new ways of thinking through colonial legacies of violence and possible healing, I am working with documented criadas of various ages, who fall across the pigmentocracy, and who were surveyed in Puerto Rico. Figueroa-Vásquez makes a clear definition of criada that prompts the reader to understand the social and historical underpinning, as "a child servant afforded a status approximating enslavement" (Figueroa-Vásquez 2020, 84). Thus, while they were not enslaved, they were not understood to be full citizens or even people either. Cheap wage labor did little to remedy antiblack violences or better the quality of life that Afro-Caribbean people could have[148].

Black Puerto Rican girls like Catalina were unwelcome in schools, and when one is unwelcome, it is felt. Eileen Findley Suarez, in her historiography *Imposing Decency* (1999), illustrates that many of the policies prompted by the United States occupation were to (re)make Puerto Rican citizens redeemable within their anglophone empire. Moreover, she shows how the constant disciplining or making of the Puerto Rican citizen has been underway since the Spanish colonial rule. Findley Suarez highlights how ideals wrapped in colonial religiosity prompted many policies meant to surveil and punitively reshape Puerto Rican practice which were not in line with colonial standards of decency. Many of these anti-Black and hygiene sanctions were

[147] As referred to earlier in the chapter, dance is a form of communication and carries meaning that it can count as a form of literacy. Here, "illiteracy" means that these women cannot read or write.

[148] Leniqueca Welcome's forthcoming work will be adding to the necessary literature chronicling domestic servants in the West Indies.

thinly veiled attempts at eugenic aims and they targeted Black populations disproportionately. These ordinances began to combat prostitution, excessive drinking, and also noise. Make no mistake, aside from slave code ordinances, these newer regulations did not mention race, but they were being enforced by people who were in official positions of power or people who were their neighbors or within their communities. People, like policies, can be fallible and racist[149]. "Female former slaves were systematically policed, mostly in the urban setting, and especially when authorities thought they had transgressed boundaries of accepted female behavior" (Rodriguez-Silva 2005, 206)[150]. The Afro-Puerto Rican woman and girl soon became targeted by these vectors of surveillance as common law marriages amongst Afro-Puerto Ricans became more common and as their bodies, as physical reminders of slavery, were deemed public and within grasp, which made claims of prostitution particularly solvent. Furthermore, the policing of noise and drinking, both of which were linked to inciting inappropriate dancing, violence, and sex outside of marriage (tantamount to prostitution), indirectly made bombazos highly criminalized and policed.

The Fernando Pico Collection highlights this criminality-associated bomba with its tabulated permits and fines. Yet people continued to *bombear*, like Catalina's sister and her friends. Not only was it a space that felt free and safe, but it was also a space to release the embodied trauma that these Afro-Puerto Rican women navigated daily. It was a place of community. Prior to emancipation it was difficult for families – Black or of color – to come together, but after emancipation, a family member might have various statuses (e.g., free, enslaved, born free), so spaces where families could see one another were few. Bailes de bomba was one of those few.

[149] The slave codes I am referencing here are the very ones discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation. The Slave Codes in Puerto Rico of 1815 and 1848.
[150] Found in the edited volume, *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*.

Acts of violence against women in Puerto Rico, particularly women of African descent, are found everywhere in the Pico Collection, both by the well-intentioned Fernando Pico, and within historical accounts. One case that stands out and apart from the two characters within my own "*bomba con conciencia*" critical fabulation rests its burden of existence on the shoulders of a man *pidiendo bomba para picar* during a *Noche Buena* celebration in 1921[151]. When his request of bomba was denied, he brandished a razor blade[152]. Even the spaces created by and for Afro-Puerto Rican women were saturated with patriarchal attempts to regulate their bodies and the practices of Black femme freedom. Bomba cannot exist separate from Puerto Rico, and for that reason I must emphasize that it is not immune to the perverse violence that cloaks the island. Thus, there was an intentional resistance within the agency that beckoned to Black women and women of Black descent into the batey.

The erasure of Black women and women of Black descent's lived experiences in the archive is a continuation of the violence of that subjugated them and attempted to stifle their practices of freedom in slavery. I have attempted to take what Marisa Fuentes (2016) calls the problem of "mutilated history" as well as this "distortion" found in the archive and sidestep reproducing the violent silence that is uncovered while also respecting it. However, Concepción and Catalina represent two very important shifts of Black and Black descended women in Puerto Rico, and particularly amongst bomberas.

Concepción represents the murky transition from slavery to freedom and the numbered but unnamed women. I had Concepción's name and refusal, but it made me think about all the names

[151] In Chapter 1 I go into detail on how bomba con conciencia is used to denote the adequate training and historical know-how a practitioner must undergo in order to consciously interact amongst elements in a bombazo. This means they understand the ways a dancer has to shift their movements and energy to connect with each varying rhythm. They demonstrate knowledge of the history, technique, and of the interaction between the drummer and dancer.

[152] *navaja* best translates to a straight razor.

I will never know. However, as many scholars of Black studies have remarked, and perhaps Saidiya Hartman most eloquently among them, searching for a book of the dead (or as my colleagues Leniqueca Welcome and Ampson Hagan have called it "the book of the names"), cements violent acts within the archive and oftentimes historian's own curiosities as well.[153] Concepción, to me, holds so many mysteries. But, to some extent I think she wanted it that way and her response, "Yo nació en el mar," led me to think that maybe others' refusal was evading documentation completely or being unnamed. Concepción, and those outside the book of names, introduced a new sequence of movement in my thinking when studying historical data, constructing my own aims within investigating historicity, and thinking about how to introduce what Avery Gordon (2008) calls a "complex personhood" to an uninterested archive.

Catalina is what academics would call a composite character, but within bomba, to people who might not know me, I might be a Catalina or a Fulana: a placeholder name for a real person, a real possibility within an impossible archive. Catalina being so young means that she would be one of the ancestors that contemporary bomberxs speak of today. Songs would mark her life. Grandchildren and children of the bomberxs who attended bailes de bomba would remark about her. Perhaps she taught them movements and how to dance certain rhythms. Catalina demonstrates the treacherous reality of domestic work, as well as the adultification of Black and Black descended children. Young girls' maturation was prompted by navigating life under constant violence and by being charged with laboring emotionally and physically for a home that took them away from their own. Within the purposes of this chapter, Catalina illustrates how embodied knowledge is acquired and inscribed onto the next generation of bomberas through the

[153] I have the pleasure of being in an interest-based writing group, their suggestions of looking for the book of names (in reference to Hartman's book of the dead) and to write about a bomba method of historicizing around the gaps and listening to what's there and not there was more generative during the writing of this chapter in more ways that I could list in a footnote.

women and environment around them. Catalina and Concepción both introduce how experience and memory hold a taut tension with academic historical scholarship.

As domestic workers, Concepción and Catalina centered criadas as an unexpected focal point within my project. Criadas were named, aged, and gave me something to cling to. Most criadas in the Pico Collection were of Black descent, meaning in Puerto Rico they were directly impacted by the stigma of slavery and anti-blackness. Domestic workers have always occupied a certain place within the context of (post)plantation societies. These marginalized women were the first models of how white supremacy poses as benevolence and (re)orders priorities of the state, leaving Black women and Black descended women disposable. Criadas were susceptible to the pervasive racism and gender violence that many Puerto Ricans deny[154]. Concepción and Catalina represent a Black Feminist practice of historicizing. In the following section I will illustrate how bombastic understandings, or the historicizing found within bomberx communities, demonstrates a similar type of care and perspective.

<u>Domingo Negrón se fue pa Nueva York y dejo sus hijos, sus hijos de corazon</u>

I have argued that Black women were seen as fungible sources of labor, unworthy of preservation, aside for their propensity to serve as cheap labor to the colonial empire. Even in the spaces that were curated for and by a Black femme freedom, like bomba, the state anticipated and surveilled Black citizens, particularly Black women, relentlessly. The regulation of bomba illustrates how violent coloniality seeped itself into the most intimate spaces, like within Black homes. In the cases of Catalina and Concepción, I deployed a Black feminist ethics of care and

[154] In addition to Isar Godreau's work around prejudice and Puerto Rico's myth surrounding benevolent slavery, the Black Latinas Know Collective have continually produced numerous works surrounding narratives of false racial utopic narratives within Puerto Rico. Some of whom are Yomaira Figueroa, Barbara Abadia-Rexach, and Shantee Rosado.

method in reading with and against the Fernando Pico Collection[155]. In a record that respects Black women as nothing more than flesh, I push for the centering of their bodies. Therefore, in the following section I analyze contemporary bomberxs historicizing of bomberxs and their relationship with their history.

"Domingo Negron,
embarco pa nueva york
Y dejo sus hijos
Hijos de corazon"
(Domingo Negro
Left to New York
And left his children
His children of his heart)

[155] Brendan Tynes in *Anthro News (*2020*)* outlines the "a (queer) Black feminist framework being necessary for a reimagination of the of our (after)lives in the wake of mass state-sanctioed Black death and violence." I find that this intention is not only illustrates a method of care for the living but also points those working with archives and the deceased.

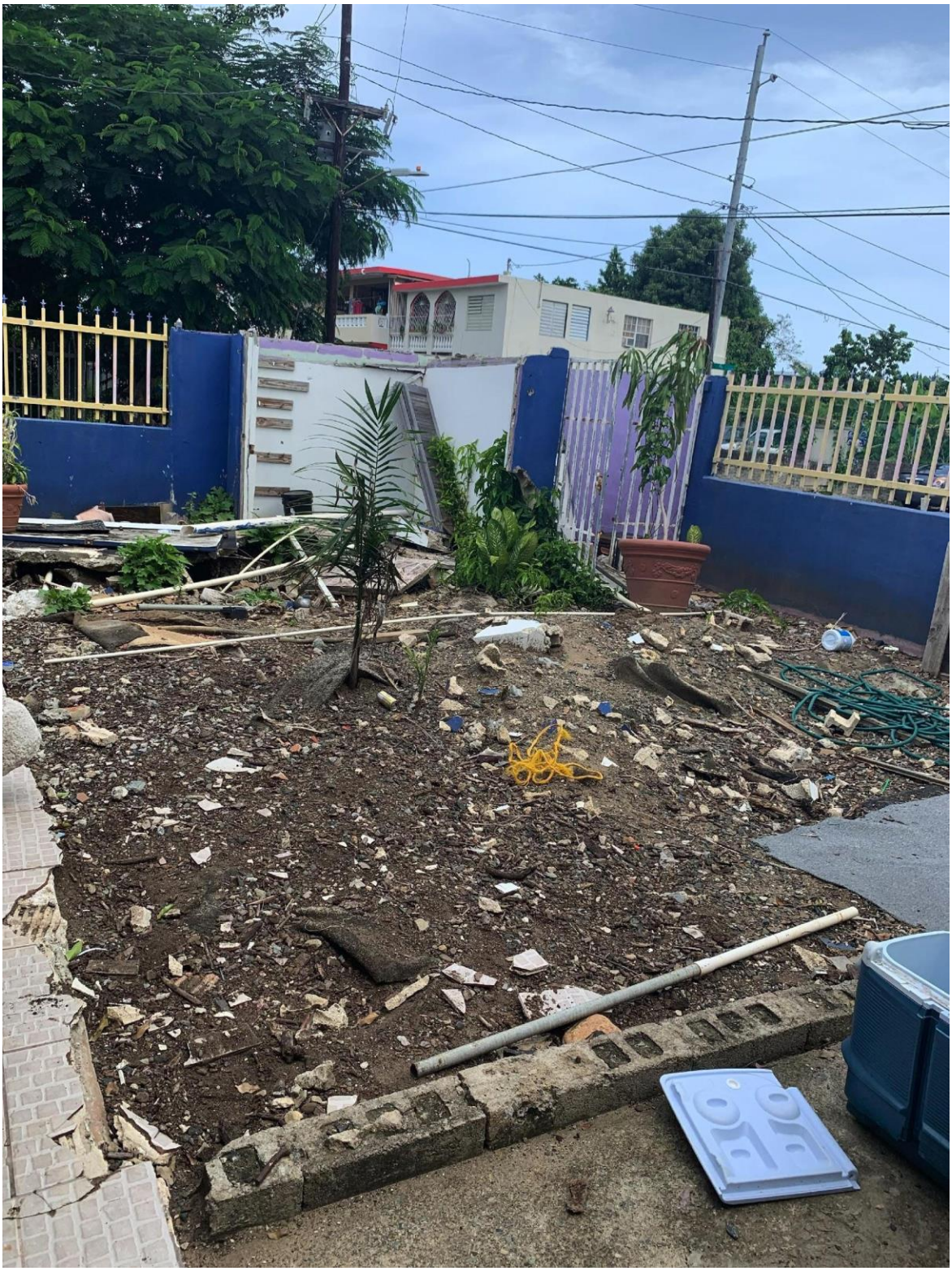

Figure 1. The batey of Domingo Negrón before participants from the Bomba Research Conference joined together to clean it. Taken in 2019 in Cataño, Puerto Rico.

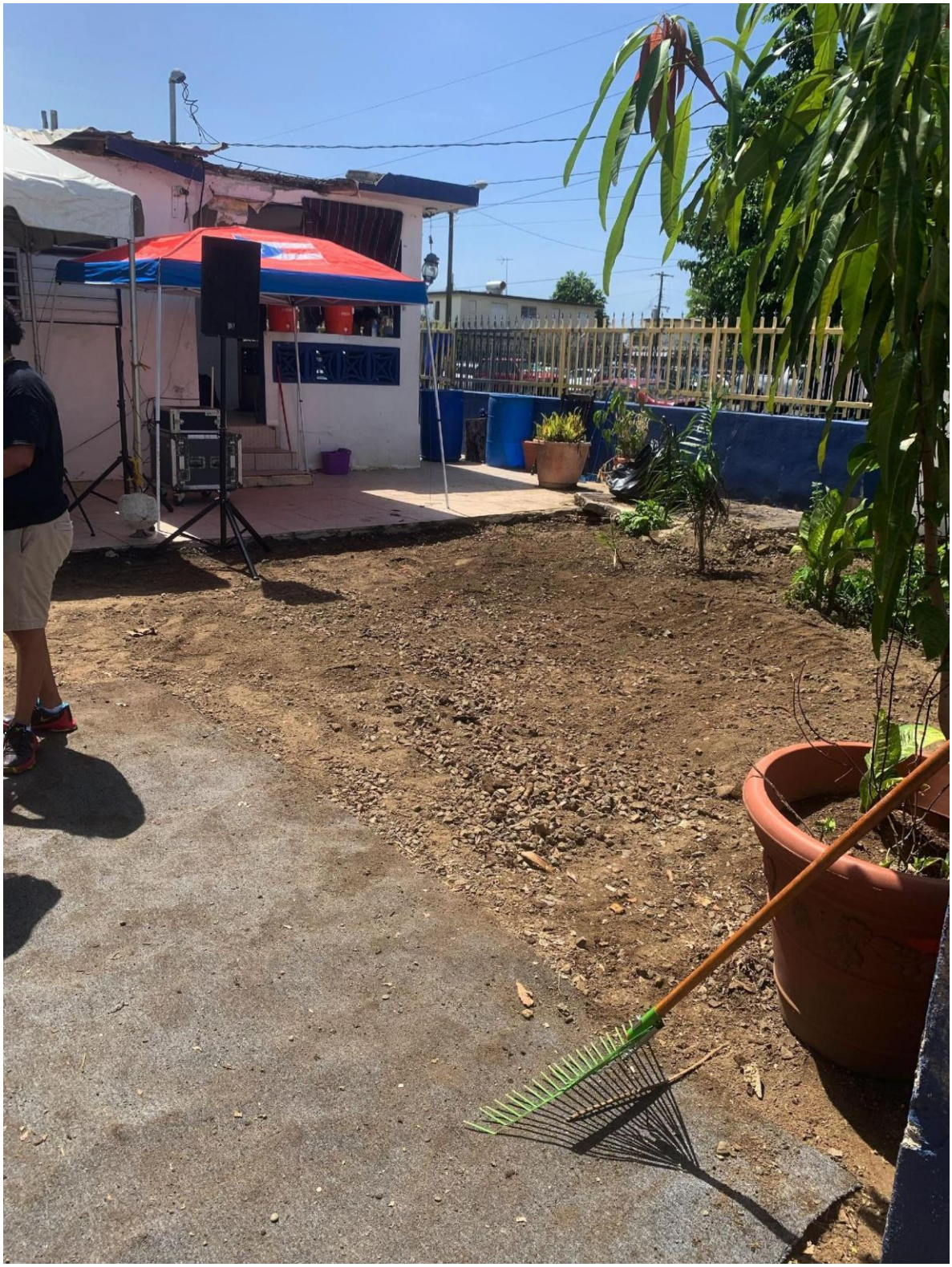

Figure 2. The batey of Domingo Negrón after participants from the Bomba Research Conference joined together to clean it. Taken in 2019 in Cataño, Puerto Rico.

In August of 2019, I attended the Bomba Research Conference (BRC) in Puerto Rico. The BRC is put on by the Puerto Rican Organization of Performing Arts (PROPA) every other year during Labor Day weekend and is organized, not by academics within a governing institution, but by intellectuals who are a part of the bomberx community. I found out about the BRC the previous year as I travelled with PROPA's co-sponsored "*Ritmos Resilientes*" healing collective through the island post-Hurricane Maria[156]. The BRC is unique in that it includes lectures, or *charlas*, by esteemed bomberxs and some academics. These talks happen under trees, in the town squares of places that once might have been Black Puerto Rican communities, on streets where bailes de bomba might have frequently taken place, or at an infamous batey. In August 2019, one of the charlas and the service project of the BRC was devoted to Domingo Negrón and his batey. As we cleaned and removed debris caused by a mango tree that fell over two years prior as a result of Hurricane Maria, we learned more about Domingo Negrón. His batey was one that was frequented by all of the great bomberxs during a time of great policing and prejudice against bomba and Afro-Puerto Ricans in the early to mid-1900s. To evade such state sanctioned violence, he would raise a blue piece of fabric to announce to the neighborhood that he would be hosting a baile de bomba. Some people traveled more than two hours to attend his gatherings in order to feel safe and celebrated and also to see family. We met his family and they learned too of the great historical significance their grand/father also held. We ended the service project by raising a blue fabric and hosting a baile de bomba once more. The singer and drummers began their session with just one of several songs inspired by Domingo Negrón.

[156] Ritmos Resilientes was made up of cultural workers traveling to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to bring bomba, as well as capoeira Angola to communities along with supplies they had crowd funded. The healing collective also called on nonwestern healing services like reiki or acupuncturists to join their tour across several municipalities. While the BRC was not a part of the healing collective in name, their governing organization, PROPA (Puerto Rican Organization of Performing Arts) was supporting the healing collective and assisting with grassroots orgs on the island to coordinate its smooth facilitation.

Domingo Negrón is a man, and while my study focuses on bomberas, there is something to be said about how a song, said to be penned by a woman, Petronilla Guilbe, offers a gift – the gift of looking for what is not there. Petrona Guillbe had to have written the song about Domingo Negrón after 1917 when he left for New York for work, according to bomba historian Jose Fernando Morales[157]. However, there is not much context as to why Negrón left. Negrón was a part of the first wave of migrant workers to the US who sent remittances back to families in Puerto Rico. "*De mi baildores aqua faltan dos*," ("Of my dancers, here we are missing two") Petronilla Guillbe of Ponce sang about her dear friend and his family that awaited his return[158]. At the same time, Black Puerto Rican women were being targeted by the police for being assumed prostitutes and bailes de bomba were being criminalized in coordination with eugenicist population control efforts of the United States. The health department not only were coercing (Afro)Puerto Rican women into medical procedures but were also putting out hygiene bulletins discouraging the attendance of late-night dancing (Silva-Rodriguez 2005, 23). But still, Petronilla Guillbe showed up to bailes and sang songs immortalizing her friends and training up what would be the next in a long tradition of female singers from southern Puerto Rico.

Me le da Memoria (It reminds me of): Conclusion

The BRC continued their important historical work during the global pandemic of COVID-19. Unlike the work that was carried out in previous years, which were intimate and localized in-person experiences, the BRC held pop-up events which were frequent, accessible, and still community focused. This demonstrated to me that for bomberxs, historical knowledge

[157] Fernandez Morales, Jose. 1999. "De Bomba y de Bombeadores: Un Acercamiento a La Tradicion de Bomba En Catano." *Dissertation*. Puerto Rico: University of Puerto Rico Centro para estudias avanzadas.
[158] While Morales (1999) places Guillbe as a bombera from Cataño, Melanie Maldonado Diaz has done the Guillbe genealogy and confirmed that she was from Ponce, Puerto Rico (Interview. October 12, 2019).

and historicizing are not separate from dancing, rather it was ingrained within the practice. Yvonne Daniels (2011), a Black dance anthropologist, states that Caribbean dance, and Afro-Caribbean dance in particular, points towards an ancestral past or allows for the incarnation of the past[159].The historical work that the BRC and the newly offered "Song and History" classes at bomba schools are doing is pointing bomberxs to their ancestors. More than that, both this bomba con conciencia historical method and Black feminist practice require care and seeing beyond the information presented on the page. While the archive presents the experiences of Black and Black-descended women as disembodied, I believe the historians that I have cited and whose methods I deploy render them embodied or representative of the wealth of experiences a body might live through.

Afro-Puerto Rican women have continued to be reduced to ornamental figures, whether it be in the batey or in census records that have become archival resources. One concerned with the lives of Black Puerto Rican women must excavate their contributions and stories that have been taken for granted, as seen with Petronilla Guillbe and Concepción. There are so many stories that are yet to be rendered visible through the years of patriarchal and antiblack silencing, however bomberxs are making strides through organizing and community-centered trainings that continue to recover these cloaked legacies.

The BRC, and particularly its director and founder, Melanie Maldonado, have continued to champion methodologies that tackle how one historicizes both women of precarious positions and embodied practices. Maldonado both draws on archival research and conducts oral

[159] Here Daniel is thinking about how many Afro-Caribbean dances may toe the line between social and sacred, the relationship between practitioners to the past is what makes "sacred" dances in afro Caribbean cultures so. While she says that bomba lies closer to the social end of the spectrum, Ashley Taylor (2019) argues and places bomba within the context of Afro-diasporic religions due to the heavy emphasis on memory and ancestors. The practitioners I work with also consider bomba and the batey to be sacred, not necessarily religious but its power is not debatable.

histories of elders within the bomberx community while creating space and mentorship for others to pursue their own research interests in early Afro-Puerto Rican life. While interviewing Maldonado, she remarked on the urgency and seriousness of the work she has done. "The *viejitos*, well they're elders, they could very well pass on at any time"[160]. In the months after Hurricane Maria, Maldonado found herself searching for the elders she spent her morning commutes talking with, some of whom transitioned to being ancestors before she was able to connect with them. I remember the pride on her face the day that she was about to memorialize Domingo Negron's batey in front of his family. They saw that the stories they heard growing up were true and that their legacy was a rich one.

The work of Maldonado, and that presented at the BRC more broadly, made me question the contours between memory and history. As Maldonado and other community historians take seriously the oral traditions of bomba, using songs and names within them as points of departure for their investigations, they almost always supplement their analysis with digitized census records, church baptism records, and familial genealogical studies. In this way, those without the disciplinary training that Maldonado herself underwent as a Ph.D. candidate can also rest on "facts" within history. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor makes the distinction that archival memory is stable (2003, 20), whereas memory is embodied and sensuous. This tension between history and memory within the study of bomba, and probably many other Black expressive sociocultural practices, is a sophisticated choreography that tarries between history and memory.

The songs themselves serve as an oral history, but even more concretely are the interviews, the lessons, and the apprenticeships under bomba elders or mayores so that newer

[160] Maldonado, Melanie. 2018. Interview with Melanie Maldonado.

contemporary practitioners are being taught the fundamentals of bomba correctly. So then, we see bomba elders taking center stage on the bomba scene, perhaps because of "memory, like the heart beats beyond our capacities to control it, a lifeline between the past and the future," or because memory points to the body "because it is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied" (Taylor 2003, 86). Elders are privileged as a lifeline between the past and future, further disarticulating linear time within bomba. Mayores are called upon to verify that the transmission of knowledge is happening and continuing, thus cementing bomba's future. The batey is where this performance of knowledge comes forth and requires a disjuncture of time in the Western sense.

Bomba interjects within the violent history and reality that follows Black or Afro-Puerto Ricans with a space of learning, remembering, and healing through its performance and pedagogy. We see memory and history inscribed on bodies and bomberxs performances refusing certain parts and emphasizing others. Most of all, learning to maneuver the methodological choreography of the archive remains extremely important to contemporary bomberxs as they continue to preserve Black Puerto Rican legacies. Through Concepción, we see another version of refusal within the repertoire of Black Puerto Rican women, one that is closer to that of Ahmed's feminist positioning of willful refusal (2014). In her avoidance of directly answering the government worker's questions, Concepción implicates Afro-Puerto Rican refusal or *resistencia* within the genealogy of refusing that Black feminist scholars Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas respectively describe as "nimble and strategic" and "quotidian and quiet"[161]. This adds texture to the ways in which bomberas refuse governmental authority and aid through Reese's self-reliant community-based refusal. The defiance enacted within and through bomba is

[161] Tina Campt cited in Deborah Thomas *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation* (2019) on page 2.

marked by daily practices, coalition building, and it is also embodied and inherited through bomberas' lived experiences.

In this chapter, I worked with an actual archive to supplement my ethnographic fieldwork to join the project of compiling affective archives as an analytic to broaden understanding of Black women's lived experiences. "Archives of affect can help us to focus on the everyday ways people innovate life without constantly projecting today's struggle into a future redemption" (Thomas 2019, 7). From the past and present, scholars can posture themselves to learn from the past and future without the weight of attempting to fix the inequities that continue to resound through time. Instead, I look at how emotional dexterity is performed within Afro-Puerto Rican women with respect to their resistencia to colonial subjecthood for possibilities of how emotional dexterity and affective archives can help us anticipate what lies in wake for Puerto Rican futurities.

Conclusion

Cuarentena:

COVID-19, Bombeando, and the Future

When COVID-19 struck the globe at the rate of a sci-fi nightmare, I was still in Puerto Rico. I remember my mom telling me about this virus on the news, and that my friends coming to visit should be extra careful. In fact, in early March of 2020, two weeks before Puerto Rico went on lockdown, my friends came to visit me from Chicago with a care package from my mom and made jokes about how paranoid and "extra" she was being. After they left Puerto Rico, the casual and mocking tones about coronavirus quickly became anxious and panicked whispers. I was living on the eastern coast of Puerto Rico in Fajardo. The area is frequented by tourists who take the ferries to the smaller islands off of its coast (Culebra and Vieques are the most popular) that champion the world's most beautiful beaches and is where most retirees buy property to settle. So, as more and more information became released about the virus, basic supplies became even harder to find in Puerto Rico. I went to four stores one day to even come across a bottle of hand sanitizer. I could only imagine how much worse it could get with Puerto Rico's status as a colony placing it in an even more vulnerable position and dependent on imports from the empire.

Nevertheless, Puerto Rico was the first place in all the United States to enforce a curfew and stay-in-place lockdown. That same night, I packed up my apartment and bought a one-way ticket to return to Chicago. As I packed up the months I spent in that apartment, I thought about the lessons I learned: putting up storm shutters during the tropical storm Dorian, how to keep gallons of water in case of the water running out, how to keep batteries because my apartment building shut electricity off during storms, and also how to be completely lost but not appear so. I learned to never look lost even if I was lost so that I would never come off as an unsuspecting woman or be vulnerable to predatory violence. With the continued and ever rising instances of

gender violence in Puerto Rico, I don't realistically think any efforts I put into presenting as aware could protect me. But, as I struggled with my two suitcases and two carry-ons, I knew I had that same posture to me because I don't think I was alone in feeling lost during the onset of the pandemic.

I knew that the interviews I had lined up could be rescheduled and done via Skype or Facetime or where life would soon be lived via Zoom. I was a little anxious about how I would continue in *bomba* dance classes, but mostly I focused on getting home and making sure my mother had supplies and was not alone. In the airport, I saw hundreds of people arriving in Puerto Rico as if there was not a lockdown. They wore no masks (they were not required yet), they complained loudly about how the curfew was ruining their vacation, and they had return flights for the States. This would only be the beginning of the gross ramifications that Puerto Rico would face as being a territory that succumbed under an imperial empire. Upon boarding the plane, I ran into a friendly face of a *bombera* who was in Puerto Rico and returning home expeditiously due to the panic of coronavirus. We decided to sit together and wipe down all of our seats. Then, after I arrived in Chicago I went home and made sure to change my clothes in the garage and went to take a shower as not to endanger my mom.

The next two days were spent at grocery stores rushing to get food and basic supplies because soon after Puerto Rico, the state-side administration began to take note and follow suit. I do remember taking a break and scrolling on Facebook. On Facebook, during Puerto Rico's first week of what would be known as "quarantine," there was a *bomberx* giving a live lesson on bomba's sicá rhythm.

To this day, that is the first dance class I saw transfer to a live online streaming option before the rush of them that followed in COVID-19's wake. I find it remarkable and at the same

time unsurprising that bomberxs amidst a global pandemic would find a way to connect via bomba and the *batey*. It underscores my own arguments, particularly in Chapter One about bomba being an embodied and historic knowledge that enables an encounter to affective forces that necessitates their emotional dexterity. Puerto Ricans endure colonialism and catastrophes that follow colonialism. Soon after that Facebook Live event, my school in Puerto Rico, *Taller Tambuye*, began online semesters of dance class. I was enrolled at Tambuye and at the Chicago-based *Escuelita Bombera de Corázon* simultaneously. I went from spending four hours a week in formal dance classes to spending almost eight hours a week in bomba related classes. In that way, my research was enriched by having access that surpassed geographical pinning, further reinforcing the ideas about the batey being aspace that operates outside of linear time and fixed space.

The batey became even more important to those who leaned into the bomberx community during quarantine. Some people were lonely, others were burnt out, and everyone wanted social distancing to end. In that way, online bateyes and communities were being stitched together by culture, history, and a commonly shared need to break up the monotony of being in the house all day. Again, this establishes the ways that the batey is dexterous enough, even if online, to be a space where people can join in the project of making amicable time. Below is an excerpt of a song from the students of La Escuelita Bombera de Corázon:

En la cuarentena, entrapa'o en la casa

Yo me volvía loco porque no había bomba,

Ay pero un milagro y atráves del internet

Yo me puse a bombear

Si tú me pregunta de donde aprendí mi sabor

Pues yo te dire de mi amiga:

De La Bombera de Corázon

(During quarantine, trapped in the house

I was going crazy because there was no bomba

But then a miracle happened and due to the internet

I began to bombear

So, if you ask me where I got my swag/flavor

I'd have to tell you, from my friend

From the Bombera de Corázon)

Bomba became the space for people to establish themselves within an ancestral intimacy that felt apart from the United States. During 2020, not only was the entire world navigating a pandemic, people of color in the United States saw white supremacy baring its nation-building teeth. Residential areas where mostly people of color lived had the highest instances and rates of COVID-19 making those very same people the ones who made up a large portion of the death toll. At the same time, police violence spiked throughout the United States as detailed in Chapter Three. People began to imagine a different world.

Many bomberxs expressed disdain for the ways in which white supremacy and governmental agencies treated Black lives as disposable. In fact, one of the most recurring events I could count on during the pandemic were Zoom meetings and roundtables hosted by PROPA (Puerto Rican Organization of Performing Arts) to continue the historicization work I highlighted in Chapter Four. It was this historicization work that stitched people back together

with preserving Black Puerto Rican legacies during a time marked by social distancing and racial unrest. In a way, COVID-19 made programming even more accessible and relevant for people who might be otherwise unable to have the time or resources to attend these events. These same bomberxs leaned into bomba to seek refuge and incite change just as they see their mayores or figuras do, like in Chapter Two. In the next iteration of this project, I look forward to using archives of affect to further test the limitations and usefulness of emotional dexterity within the ontological positioning of colonial subjects. I hope to continue exploring how the batey and possibly other dance floors can be generative in pointing towards a new future.

The very same improvisational know-how a bombera must have to piquetear in a batey, the ability to know the limitations of each rhythm and how to masterfully make use of *contratempo* and *afuera de tiempo* riffs over the base rhythms, is the same type of creativity needed to imagine a new future. The difficulty there lies in knowing how the metronome of coloniality functions and what are its limitations since white supremacy has a way of keeping its most perverse truths secret. Yet and still, bomberxs have used the batey to animate their emotional dexterity that undergirds their endurance and everyday escape of violences since the bomba's inception and this falls in line with that legacy. Even if there is no way for sure to be certain how Concepción, or other enslaved women felt, bomba offers us a guide, an entry point towards understanding and accepting that there might not ever be concrete answers. Figuras demonstrate how embodied epistemologies are inscribed onto the body and also how to allow these embodied historical legacies could be acted out through the ways in which they continue to live in the inheritance of Black femme freedom and care not only for one another on an intimate level but extending their care on an infrastructural level to correct even government institutions. Furthermore, there is no doubt in my head that if bomberxs can imagine decolonization in a

batey, that they will work to make that possible outside of it because once you become a bomberx *you walk different.*

Bibliography

Abadía-Rexach, Bárbara I. 2012. *Musicalizando La Raza: La Racialización En Puerto Rico a Través de La Música*. Primera edición. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Puerto.

Ahmed, Sara. 2010a. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2010b. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

———. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Aparicio, Frances R. 1998. *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*. Music/Culture. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Badillo, Jalil, and Angel López Cantos. 2007. *Puerto Rico Negro*. Editorial Cultural, Rio Piedras, P.R.

Barton, Halbert. 1995. *The Drum-Dance Challenge: An Anthropological Study of Gender, Race, and Class Marginalization of Bomba in Puerto Rico*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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

Bergin, K. A. 2008. "Witness: The Racialized Gender Implications of Katrina". In *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, edited by Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke, 173–190. New York: Palgrave.

Berlant, Lauren. 2008. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Berry, Maya, Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada. 2017. "Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field." *Cultural Anthropology*. 32(4):537–65.

Black, Steven. 2018. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Care." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47:79–95.

Bonilla, Yarimar. 2017. "Unsettling Sovereignty." *Cultural Anthropology*. 32(3):330–39.

Bonilla, Yarimar, and Marisol LeBrón. 2019. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico before and After the Storm*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Bonilla, Yarimar, Marisol LeBron, Sarah Molinari, and Isabel Tamargo. N.D. "Puerto Rico Syllabus." *#PRSyllabus* (blog). https://puertoricosyllabus.com/.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Richard Nice. 2008. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. New York: Routledge.

Briggs, Laura. 2002. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Browning, Barbara. 1995. *Samba: Resistance in Motion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Buckland, Fiona. 2002. *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press.

Camal, Jerome. 2019. *Creolized Aurality: Guadeloupean Gwoka and Postcolonial Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Campt, Tina, and Deborah Thomas. 2008. "Gendering Diaspora: Transnational Feminism, Diaspora and Its Hegemonies." *Feminist Review*. 90: 1–8.

Carrasquillo, Rosa E. 2006. *Our Landless Patria: Marginal Citizenship and Race in Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1880-1910*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Casey, Edward S. 1987. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Chin, Elizabeth. 2014. *Katherine Dunham: Recovering an Anthropological Legacy, Choreographing Ethnographic Futures*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

Christian, Barbara. 1987. "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique*. 6: 51–63.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Corujo, Cristina. 2021. "Puerto Rico Declares State of Emergency Over Gender Violence." *ABC News.*, January 25, 2021.

Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Crawley, Ashon. 2021. "Resonance: Neutrinos and Black Life." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3(1): 48-58.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". University of Chicago Legal Forum. Vol. 1989:1-8.

Daniel, Yvonne. 1995. *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

———. 2005. *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

———. 2011. *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press.

Dávila, Arlene M. 1997. *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Davis, Angela. 1972. “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves.” *The Massachusetts Review*. 13(2): 81–100.

Denis, Nelson A. 2015. *War against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America’s Colony*. New York: Nation Books.

Dinzey-Flores, Zaire Zenit. 2013. *Locked in, Locked out: Gated Communities in a Puerto Rican City*. The City in the Twenty-First Century. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Downey, Greg. 2005. *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Duany, Jorge. 2002. *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Dufrasne-González, J. Emanuel. 1985. *La homogeneidad de la música caribeña: sobre la música comercial y popular de Puerto Rico*.

Ellis, Nadia. 2015. *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ellis Neyra, Ren. 2020. *The Cry of the Senses: Listening to Latinx and Caribbean Poetics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Fernandez Morales, Jose. 1999. “De Bomba y de Bombeadores: Un Acercamiento a La Tradicion de Bomba En Catano.” Dissertation, Centro para estudias avanzadas, University of Puerto Rico.

Ferreras, Salvador E. 2005. “Solo Drumming in the Puerto Rican Bomba: An Analysis of Musical Processes and Improvisational Strategies.” Disseration, Faculty of Graduate Studies (Music), University of British Columbia.

Figueroa, Luis A. 2005. *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Figueroa-Vásquez, Yomaira. 2020a. “After the Hurricane: Afro-Latina Decolonial Feminisms and Destierro.” *Hypatia* 35 (Winter): 220–9.

———. 2020b. “Afro-Boricua Archives: Paperless People and Photo/Poetics as Resistance.” *Post 45*. http://post45.org/2020/01/afro-boricua-archives-paperless-people-and-photo-poetics-as-resistance/. January 21, 2020.

Findlay, Eileen. 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2014. *We Are Left without a Father Here: Masculinity, Domesticity, and Migration in Postwar Puerto Rico*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Flores, Juan. 2000. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fuentes, Marisa. 2016. *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive.* Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

García-Peña, Lorgia. 2016. *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gilman, Lisa. 2011. *The Dance of Politics: Gender, Performance, and Democratization in Malawi*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Godreau, Isar. 2015. *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Godreau, Isar, Mariogla Reyes Cruz, Mariluz Franco Ortiz, and Sherry Cuadrado. 2008. "The Lessons of Slavery: Discourses of Slavery, Mestizaje, and Blanqueamiento in an Elementary School in Puerto Rico." *American Ethnologist* 35(1): 115–35.

González, José Luis. 1989. *El País de Cuatro Pisos y Otros Ensayos*. Río Piedras, P.R: Ediciones Huracán.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. 2016. *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hanchard, Michael. 1999. "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora." *Public Culture*. 11 (1): 245–268.

Harrison, Faye. 2014. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Washington, D.C: Association of Black Anthropologists: American Anthropological Association.

Hartman, Saidiya V. 2007. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

———. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12 (2): 1–14.

———. 2019. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Jiménez Román, Miriam, and Juan Flores. 2010. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Johnson, Jessica Marie. 2020. *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kerman, Piper. 2011. *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

King, Tiffany Lethabo. 2019. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kinsbruner, Jay. 1973. *The Spanish-American Independence Movement*. Hinsdale, Ill: Dryden Press.

———. 1996. *Not of Pure Blood: The Free People of Color and Racial Prejudice in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2000. *Independence in Spanish America: Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Underdevelopment*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Kun, Josh. 2005. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

LeBrón, Marisol. 2019. *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lewis, Oscar. 1966. *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan and New York*. New York: Random House.

Levy, Teresita A. 2015. *Puerto Ricans in the Empire: Tobacco Growers and U.S. Colonialism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Lloréns, Hilda. 2005. *Fugitive blackness: Representations of race, art, and memory in Arroyo, Puerto Rico*. Dissertation. University of Connecticut.

———. 2014. *Imaging the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender during the American Century*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

López, Iris Ofelia. 2008. *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women's Struggle for Reproductive Freedom*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Maddox-Wingfield, Camee. 2018. "The Dance Chose Me: Womanist Reflections on Bèlè Performance in Contemporary Martinique." *Meridians* 16 (2): 295–307.

Maldonado, Melanie. 2008. "Bomba Trigueña: Diluted Culture and (Loss of) Female Agency in AfroPuerto Rican Music and Dance Performance." In *Caribbean Without Borders: Literature, Language and Culture*, edited by Dorsia Smith Silva, Raquel Puig, and Ileana Cortés Santiago, 95–117. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

———. 2019. "Suelta El Mono: The Herstories of Change Agents and Perpetuators of Bomba Culture." *Centro Journal.* 31 (2): 86-109.

Marques, Domingo, Ayesha Mahmud, Matthew Kiang, and Irmary Rodriguez. 2018. "Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria." *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 378 (May): 162–70.

Marx, Karl, Ben Fowkes, and David Fernbach. 1981. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

Mason, J. Alden. 1914. *Letters to Franz Boas*. Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

Massumi, Brian. 2015. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

McCoy, Alfred. W., and Francisco A. Scarano. 2009. *The Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press.

McGlotten, Shaka. 2013. *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mintz, Sidney Wilfred. 1974. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History*. New York: W.W. Norton.

———. 1986. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin Books.

Moten, Fred. 2003. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Muñoz, José Esteban. 2006. "'Chico, what does it feel like to be a problem?' The Transmission of Brownness." In *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, edited by Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo, 441-451. Chichester, England: Wilely-Blackwell.

Narayan, Kirin. 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nash, Jennifer. 2011. "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality." *Meridians* 11 (2): 1–24.

———. 2019. *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Negrón-Portillo, Mariano, and Raúl Mayo Santana. 1992. *La Esclavitud Urbana En San Juan de Puerto Rico: Estudio Del Registro de Esclavos de 1872, Primera Parte*. Río Piedras, P.R: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán.

———. 2007. *La Esclavitud Menor: La Esclavitud En Los Municipios Del Interior de Puerto*

Rico En El Siglo XIX. Río Piedras, P.R: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán.

Osumare, Halifu. 2018. *Dancing in Blackness: A Memoir*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press.

Overman, Charles Theodore. 1975. *A Family Plantation: The History of the Puerto Rican Hacienda "La Enriqueta."* San Juan, PR: Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia.

Pastrana, Carlos. 2009. "Con El Eco de los Barriles: Race, Gender and the Bomba Imaginary In Puerto Rico." *Identities*. 16(5): 573–600.

Pérez, Gina M. 2004. *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ramos-Zayas, Ana Y. 2003. *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rangelova, Radost. 2015. *Gendered Geographies in Puerto Rican Culture: Spaces, Sexualities, Solidarities*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Reese, Ashanté M. 2019. *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Rivera-Rideau, Petra R. 2015. *Remixing Reggaetón: The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rivero, Yeidy M. 2005. *Tuning out Blackness: Race and Nation in the History of Puerto Rican Television*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Robinson, Cedric J. 2000. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press.

Rodríguez-Silva, Ileana M. 2021. *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rosa, Jonathan. 2019. *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ruiz, Sandra. 2019. *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance*. New York: New York University Press.

Sánchez Korrol, Virginia. 1983. *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Sanchez, Ray. 2019. "Puerto Rico Governor Rosselló Private Chats." *CNN*, July 17, 2019, Web edition. https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/16/us/puerto-rico-governor-rossello-private-chats.

Scarano, Francisco A. 1984. *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800-1850*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press.

———. 2008. *Puerto Rico: cinco siglos de historia*. San Juan, P.R.: McGraw-Hill Interamericana.

Scully, Pamela, and Diana Paton. 2005. *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.

Shange, Ntozake. 2020. *Dance We Do: A Poet Explores Black Dance*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Shange, Savannah. 2019. *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Anitblackness, and Schooling in San Francisco*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. 2010. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sklar, Deidre. 2008. "Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge." In *Migrations of Gesture*, edited by Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, 85–111. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Smith, Christen. 2016. "Facing the Dragon: Black Mothering, Sequelae, and Gendered Necropolitics in the Americas." *Transforming Anthropology*. 24 (1): 31–48.

Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*. 17 (2): 64–81.

Stark, David Martin. 2017. *Slave Families and the Hato Economy in Puerto Rico*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Stern, Daniel N. 1985. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. New York: Basic Books.

Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 2013. *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Taylor, Ashley Coleman. 2019. "'Water Overflows with Memory': Bomba, Healing, and the Archival Oceanic." *Centro Journal.* 31 (11): 137–60.

Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Thomas, Deborah A. 2004. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2011. *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2019. *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation: Sovereignty, Witnessing, Repair*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1999. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press.

———. 2002. "Culture on the Edges: Caribbean Creolization in Historical Context." In *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, edited by Brian Axel, 189–210. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tynes, Brendane. 2020. "How Do We Listen to the Living?" *Anthropology News* website, August 31, 2020.

Vega-Drouet, Hector. 1979. "Historical and Ethnological Survey on Probable African Origins of the Puerto Rican Bomba, Including A Description of Santiago Apostol Festivities At Loiza Aldea." Dissertation, Wesleyan University.

Weinbaum, Alys Eve. 2019. *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Williams, Bianca C. 2018. *The Pursuit of Happiness: Black Women, Diasporic Dreams, and the Politics of Emotional Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Wright, Michelle M. 2015. *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wynter, Sylvia. 1990. "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Woman". In *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature,* edited by Carole Boyce-Davies and Elaine Savory-Fido, 355-72.Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.