

Precarious Aesthetics and Performances of Labor in Migration in the Neoliberal Caribbean

By

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This project examines how, in an increasingly precarious global economy buttressed by the tenets of neoliberalism, Caribbean theater and performance have often been a transnational forum for aesthetically exploring the limitations of this economic reality. Theater practitioners themselves often travel back and forth between the archipelago and the mainland and the theme of labor migration has been a common one since large-scale modernization plans in places such as Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic led to sizable waves of economically motivated migrants who traveled back and forth for work. I base my analysis on plays and works of performance art that engage thematically with labor and migration within the entrenched neoliberal context that has emerged since the 1980s. I argue that Puerto Rican and Dominican theater and performance use aesthetic strategies to highlight the embodied experience of a long history of labor migration while simultaneously drawing audience members into a community that allows for imagining modes of connection and solidarity outside of this seemingly exhaustive grasp of neoliberalism.

This project expands on recent work that has been done at the intersection of Latin(x) American Theater studies and neoliberalism, making a contribution to this area of study in that the narrow focus of my project on the Caribbean—and more specifically Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic—takes seriously a challenge that has been made by researchers within this field to think about the impact of neoliberalism in more concrete and regionally specific terms. I address how the works under analysis in this study engage both with this history of coerced modernization and with the solidifying neoliberal reality that provides the backdrop for the contemporary works under consideration here.

This project also aims to fill a scholarly void related to the representation of the Caribbean in work on contemporary theater and performance in Latin(x) America. Much of the scholarship produced around theater and neoliberalism in Latin(x) America centers around specific crises—for example, femicides in Mexico and Central America; narco-trafficking between Mexico and the United States; the Special Period in Cuba; the neoliberal transitions in nations such as Chile, Argentina and Guatemala; and the Zapatista uprising in response to NAFTA. While crises like these often bring the impact of neoliberalism into sharp relief and undoubtedly have inspired many works of theater and performance, I am equally interested in this project in the ways that theater and performance draw on aesthetics to theorize the impact of neoliberalism on everyday lived realities in a Caribbean context

With this in mind, each of the three chapters groups key works of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and diasporic theater and performance according to shared aesthetic qualities. I first look at canonical works of theater that feature labor migration journeys, analyzing the way that both Puerto Rican and Dominican works staged in the late 1980s and early 1990s dwell in a sense of impasse rather than the hopeful nationalism of previous decades. Second, I look at three

works of solo performance from the same time period and examine how they use the presence of a single body onstage to challenge the logic and value of productivity that underpins the neoliberal regime. Finally, I shift my focus to multi-disciplinary performance representations of garment industry labor. I delve into what I term an “erotic ethics” being proposed via the aestheticized incorporation of textile onstage, the garment industry labor it evokes, and the way it challenges spectators’ everyday connections to those that perform this labor.

In response to an international division of labor that often violently enforces the positioning of racialized bodies from the global south as expendable, in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, theater and performance ultimately become a space of resistant forms of collectivity and connection.

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Introduction. Confronting Neoliberal Failures at the Theater

Perhaps no single performance has highlighted for me more the connection among the concepts explored in this current project—aesthetics, resistance, labor, and migration—than the New York-based Puerto Rican theater ensemble Teatro Pregones’ staging of their well-known repertory play *El Apagón/The Blackout* in Minneapolis less than two years after Hurricane Maria had devastated the island. I entered the Avalon Theater in Minneapolis on a cold, snowy March afternoon and found the warmth and comradery evident within to be in stark contrast to the chill outside. I was welcomed enthusiastically by those coordinating the event as I stepped into a lobby filled with groups chatting in a mix of English and Spanish next to a table staffed by the Coalición de Boricuas en Minnesota, who were providing information and taking donations for Puerto Ricans impacted by Hurricane Maria. As the doors to the theater opened, a crowd made up of a group of individuals that seemed to be regulars at Teatro del Pueblo events, a handful of university-affiliated spectators like myself, and a large number of families—many with small children—trickled into the waiting rows of seats. Far from the detached feeling of some more formal theater spaces, it was clear that this was a community theater event.

As the production was about ready to begin, Alberto Justiniano, the Artistic Director of Teatro del Pueblo, took the stage to introduce the play. He welcomed the crowd with an enthusiastic, “Bueno, ¿cómo están?” which was met with a genial “¡Bien!” from the crowd. He proceeded to introduce the production, emphasizing its 30-year history and iconic status in the history of New York Puerto Rican theater. His framing of the production for the audience also included a shout-out to the aforementioned Coalición de Boricuas en Minnesota table as well as an acknowledgement of the members of the Local 26 branch of the Service Employees

International Union, which drew spectators into a space inflected as both Puerto Rican and working class—a nod to Teatro Pregones’ roots in Puerto Rican working class communities in the Bronx. And he ended by calling attention to members of the audience that were recently arrived from Puerto Rico after having been displaced by the hurricane, saying:

Los queremos. We love you. Also, we appreciate you and we hear you. Los escuchamos. También, you are valued. You are important. You count, and we won’t forget you... Sí, Minnesota es frío. Yes Minnesota is cold. Pero hay mucha gente con cariño. There’s a lot of people with warm hearts. So just know that we love you and we welcome you... El teatro is your theater.

While these elements of the audience—Puerto Rican Minnesotans, the union workers and recently arrived displaced Puerto Ricans—were not perhaps even a majority of audience members present in the theater, Justiniano’s highlighting of these specific groups of spectators set the tone for the performance event. If Hurricane Maria served to bring into stark relief the many ways that government and other social institutions, a crumbling physical infrastructure, a modernized and then neoliberalized economy in crisis and patterns of migration to the mainland had already failed to provide a sustainable model for survival on the island, then Justiniano’s framing of the production in terms of community, care, and relation begin to articulate a space for aesthetics— theater and performance aesthetics specifically—in confronting these failures.

While not every moment of the rise of neoliberalism in the Caribbean has been experienced in such an acute way as Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria, its impact on everyday life has been significant. In this study, I specifically consider the way that, in an increasingly precarious global economy characterized by recurring crises and buttressed by the tenets of neoliberalism, Caribbean theater and performance has often been used as a transnational forum for the exploration of the limitations of this economic reality. Theater practitioners themselves often travel back and forth between the archipelago and the mainland, and the theme

of labor migration has been a common one since large-scale modernization plans in places such as Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic led to sizable waves of economically motivated migrants who traveled back and forth for work. Drawing on various plays and works of performance art that engage thematically with labor and migration and that have emerged since the entrenchment of neoliberalism in the region after the 1970s, I interrogate how Puerto Rican and Dominican theater and performance not only hold space for those impacted by the violence inherent in an economic system that depends on the dispossession and migration of certain bodies but also proposes other ways of imagining collectivity and solidarity that break free from the seemingly exhaustive grasp of neoliberalism. I do this in three ways across the three following chapters: (1) I explore the theatrical legacy of René Marqués' 1954 play from Puerto Rico, *La carreta*, analyzing the way that both Puerto Rican and Dominican works staged in the late 1980s and early 1990s and that similarly follow migrant laborers to the continental U.S. dwell in a sense of impasse rather than the hopeful nationalism of previous decades; (2) in the second chapter, I look at three works of solo performance from the same time period and examine how they challenge the logic and value of productivity that underpins the neoliberal regime; (3) in the final chapter, I shift to my focus to multi-disciplinary performance representations of garment industry labor, delving into the “erotic ethics” being proposed via the aesthetic incorporation of this kind of labor in the works considered.

Latin(x) Theater and Neoliberalism

This project expands on recent work that has been done at the intersection of Latin(x) American Theater studies and neoliberalism, making a contribution to this area of study in that the narrow focus of my project on the Caribbean—and more specifically Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic—takes seriously a challenge that has been made by researchers within this

field to think about the impact of neoliberalism in more concrete and regionally specific terms. I address how the works under analysis in this study engage both with this history of coerced modernization and with the solidifying neoliberal reality that provides the backdrop for the contemporary works under consideration here. I seek to follow the cue from scholars such as Arlene Dávila and Patricia Ybarra to attend to how the works considered in this study stage the emerging crisis of neoliberalism within their specific transnational and regional Caribbean contexts during the eighties and into the present. This project attempts to fill a scholarly void related to the representation of the Caribbean in work on contemporary theater and performance in Latin(x) America. Much of the scholarship produced around theater and neoliberalism in Latin(x) America centers around specific crises—for example, femicides in Mexico and Central America; narco-trafficking between Mexico and the United States; the Special Period in Cuba; the neoliberal transitions in nations such as Chile, Argentina and Guatemala; and the Zapatista uprising in response to NAFTA. While crises like these, and like the one brought on by Hurricane Maria that I invoke above, often bring the impact of neoliberalism into sharp relief and undoubtedly have inspired many works of theater and performance, I am equally interested in this project in the ways that theater and performance draw on aesthetics to theorize the impact of neoliberalism on everyday lived realities in a Caribbean context.

Context: Neoliberalism, Migration and Labor

In terms of geographical and historical context, this project revolves heavily around works produced after the late 1980s with the bulk of them being produced in the 1990s. This focus allows for the consideration of the convergence of three significant strains related to the economic history of this time period: (1) the coalescing of neoliberalism in the Americas, (2) resulting patterns of migration and displacement in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and

(3) a growing tendency to frame immigrants to the U.S. and their claim to belonging in terms of their labor.

Neoliberalism in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic

While the term “neoliberalism” can be expansive and imprecise, I agree with Patricia Ybarra that it is a useful term for articulating the particularity of the latest iteration of capitalism that envelops the world today (5). There is something about naming it that captures the agentic nature of state governments and other entities in its unfolding, that counteracts the sense of inevitability that centering equally relevant terms such as “transnationalism” or “globalization” might inadvertently imply and that simultaneously encompasses both the economic and discursive aspects of this regime. For the purposes of this project, neoliberalism is understood in the following way: it is the global intensification of capitalism starting during the second half of the twentieth century through the enactment of economic policies favoring deregulation, privatization, the decline of labor organizing power, the free movement of capital and the heavily controlled mobilization of laborers; simultaneously, it is the governing logic that emerges during this time period that both facilitates and naturalizes a way of seeing the world through the lens of market value.¹ This last point captures what I refer to in this project as “market logic.” While the neoliberal regime emerged in prior decades, the 1980s is generally considered the decade of its coalescing and the 1990s can in turn be understood as the decade of its ossification. In Latin America generally, this looked like a widespread economic crisis in the 1980s stemming from the excessive growth of foreign debts and the resulting embrace of neoliberal plans based on

¹ For a detailed breakdown of the simultaneous development of both the economic structure of neoliberalism and the way that it perpetuates its own logic, see David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. For an in-depth exploration of the way that this logic comes to displace all other modes of human existence under a neoliberal regime see Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*.

global financial entities such as the IMF which sought to ameliorate the effects of the crisis through various austerity-related policies known together as the “Washington Consensus.” (O’Toole 474-77).

While Puerto Rico’s economy was somewhat isolated from this broad decade of crisis in Latin America due to its political status as a U.S. territory, the entire history of the island’s economic relationship with the U.S. arguably set the stage for the neoliberal policies that both resulted in and responded to this crisis. Puerto Rico’s economic history is defined by its status as a laboratory that experts and government officials used to rehearse the kinds of development plans and financial policies that later became characteristics of a neoliberal shift throughout the hemisphere. Operation Bootstrap—an industrialization program launched by the Puerto Rican government in 1947 in order to address poverty and unemployment—began as a plan by which the island would invest in growing industries plan but quickly shifted to an export-led industrialization model (Lapp 183; Padín 19). Throughout the 1950s, Puerto Rico attracted the attention of social scientists and other experts who were specifically interested in how this model would work as well as its potential for replication in other countries.² Although the island economy saw a period of growth between 1960 and 1965, growing competition in cheaper labor markets around the globe as well as a brief recession between 1973 and 1976 resulted in the enactment of Section 936 of the federal tax code (Cabán 166; Duany 91). Section 936 provided a tax exemption for U.S. firms that invested in Puerto Rico.

In Puerto Rico, this process happened along a different timeline due to the island’s continued colonial relationship with the U.S., however a similar reliance on neoliberal policies emerged in the 1990s. On this island, mid-century economic development policies which were

² See Michael Lapp’s article “The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory” for a detailed history of how social scientists both drove and studied this modernization process.

touted during the Cold War as “a successful case of democratic development” (Cabán 164), which thus conflating politics with economic policy and strategy, followed a trajectory marked by economic stagnation in the 1970s and the enactment of Section 936, a law meant to attract outside private firms which resulted in the extensive ownership and management of island-based firms by U.S.-based firms.³ This economic context in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico provides a backdrop for the migratory patterns featured in the works of theater and performance considered in this project. In 1996, the Clinton administration approved the Small Business Job Protection Act, which included a provision for the phasing out of Section 936 over the course of a decade and ultimately led to the economic crisis that began in around 2006 and has impacted the economy of the island ever since (Cabán 167-73). It is this historical process of development that led Carmen Teresa Whalen to label Puerto Rico “the first export processing zone” (46) and which led José Antonio Padín to highlight how Puerto Rico became a model for later neoliberal initiatives such as IMF’s structural adjustments, free-trade and export-processing zones, and Reagan’s Caribbean Basin Initiative (35). While Puerto Rico’s neoliberal trajectory is set apart from the rest of Latin America, it is also one of the first geographical locations in the Western Hemisphere where neoliberal development policies were fine-tuned and abandoned before being used elsewhere. The Puerto Rican works in this dissertation are mainly set against this backdrop of increasing reliance on privatization and external investment and the ensuing crisis that began to take shape in the 1990s before exploding in 2006 with the end of Section 936.

The Dominican Republic, in contrast, shares a neoliberal fate with the rest of the Latin American economies that experienced the so-called “lost decade” of the 1980s. In the Dominican Republic, like in these other economies, a growing dependence on infusions of foreign capital

³ See Dietz 499-501, Cabán 163-168 and Padin 18-21 for a more extensive analysis of the impact of Section 936, as well as its eventual phasing out, on the Puerto Rican economy.

leading up to the 1980s resulted in a debt crisis that conservative governments across the globe saw as an opportunity to promote market-oriented policy reforms throughout Latin America similar to the ones with which experts had experimented with in Puerto Rico during previous decades (O'Toole 475-76). While countries such as Mexico and Chile showed signs of sustainable long-term growth entrenched in neoliberalism through the 1990s, the Dominican Republic was slower with policy reforms (O'Toole 477). The promotion of export manufacturing—especially through free trade zones and tourism—stimulated growth in the 1990s but failed to improve living conditions for most Dominicans (Duany 59). However, the Dominican economy was permanently transformed during this time as between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s and facilitated by the devaluation of Dominican currency in 1985 which made the island's low labor cost attractive to investors, the number of export-processing zones more than tripled and the number of companies involved in them more than doubled (Mortimore 298-299). The Dominican works that I take up in this dissertation are situated within this context of the entrenchment of this neoliberalized labor market.

I find these specific neoliberal contexts important to keep in mind throughout the following chapters as the local specificities of the impact of neoliberal policies are central to my approach to the works I analyze in this project. As Raewyn Connell helpfully articulates, “neoliberal regimes have been created by stitching together a coalition of social forces and finding a locally gripping ideological language” (35). In other words, while it is possible to think about neoliberalism in general terms as a restructuring economic force and logic, its emergence is marked by particularities and inequalities. Moreover, while contemporary theater research related to neoliberalism tends to emphasize an ever-more-common experience of precarity as the dominant mode of existence and the basis for new solidarities, Tavia Nyong'o cautions readers

to remember that precariousness is not always distributed evenly (158). As Latinx scholars such as Arlene Dávila and Patricia Ybarra have pointed out, applying the concept “neoliberalism” as a blanket term— “as a ‘thing’ rather than as a process” (“Locating” 552), to adopt a helpful phrase from Dávila—erases specific local realities, exacerbated inequalities and uneven modes of application.⁴ I agree with Ybarra that it is important that “we understand the complex trafficking of bodies, goods, and ideas as embodied and performative practices that interrogate modes of nationalism *emergent in* rather than *counter to* neoliberal ideology and practice” (9). The narrow scope of this project, which focuses on Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, facilitates this more nuanced understanding of neoliberalism and its effects.

Neoliberalism and the Logic of Logistics

Because my project, due to its focus on the topic of migration in theater, is related to questions of mobility, I also find it helpful to complement this my understanding of neoliberalism with knowledge of the emergence of the field of logistics, a field that is defined by a convergence of first liberal and then neoliberal thought and questions of mobility. The science of logistics is the Fordist assembly line factory come to life on a global and totalizing scale. As Deborah Cowen describes in her book *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, adopted from the field of warfare strategy after World War II, the field of logistics boomed in the 1960s as part and parcel of the emergence of the neoliberal supply chain. It was between the 1970s and 1990s, however, that a massive trend toward deregulation and an intensification of intermodalism—or the organization of transportation across a variety of modes within the same supply chain—led to a boom in growth for the transportation industry. This

⁴ See Arlene Dávila’s “Locating Neoliberalism in Time, Space, and ‘Culture’” and *Culture Works: Space, Value, and Mobility Across the Neoliberal Americas*, as well as Patricia Ybarra’s *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*.

dependence of the neoliberal regime on the efficient movement of goods puts one in mind of Mimi Sheller's highlighting of the issue of mobility in the context of contemporary capitalism by attending to the way that the mobility of certain commodities and bodies in the Caribbean depends on the fixing in place of others (*Consuming* 27-30). Also, seeking to add nuance to the notion of global mobility, theorists such as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, contrast the myth of flowing and borderless global movement that became popularized in the 1990s with the historical reality of global connections laden with "friction" (5-6). These theoretical approaches are a reminder within this historical context of the impact that logistics and its ensuing logic has on human bodies. While the global supply chain, maquilas, and free trade zones are more often invoked as the hallmarks of neoliberalism's spatial organization, it is the field of logistics and its steadily increasing drive toward the seamlessly efficient movement of goods on a global scale that undergirds all of these. Because the characters in the works considered in this project stage constant movement—often in relation to both migrant journeys and an aesthetics based in constant embodied motion—keeping in mind the way that logistics orchestrates the movement of goods and bodies on a global scale is a useful metaphor throughout this project.

Migration from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic

Key to the analyses in all three chapters included in this dissertation is an awareness of the way that the neoliberal economic context described above has explicitly led to the displacement and movement of laborers from both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic to the mainland. While Puerto Rican migration is often highlighted in the context of its back-and-forth flow which is facilitated by the fact that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, in drawing Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic together in this comparative project, it is the common experience of displacement due to neoliberal economic policies that critical attention.

In the early twentieth century, the majority of Puerto Rican migrants to the U.S. were recruited to go to Hawaii to work in the sugar can industry (Duany 48). Along with African Americans from the South, they were also recruited throughout the 1920s to work in New York City's manufacturing sector, taking the place of white laborers who had achieved some measure of upward mobility (Grosfoguel and Geora 106) After this, the largest spike in Puerto Rican migration to the United States occurred after World War II due to the aforementioned Operation Bootstrap, which transformed the island's agriculture-based economy and inspired the emigration of principally uneducated and unskilled workers who were incorporated into the U.S. manufacturing economy and mainly inner-city housing zones of New York City and other urban centers. As Michael Lapp notes, "During the heyday of what the Puerto Rican government would call 'Operation Bootstrap,' urban planners, economists, sociologists, and other academic researchers attempted to create in Puerto Rico a social laboratory, a model for Third World economic development, and a 'showcase for democracy'" (170). While encouraging the use of birth control in family planning was a large part of the strategy for stemming population increase, migration—mainly to the U.S. but also to other countries—was also part of the modernization strategy (Lapp 181). This plan in turn required a redistribution of laborers on the island and general policies of population control in order to create a sufficient number of industrial jobs that would aid economic development (Lapp 180-181). This mid-century period of development is characteristic of a global trend of Fordist economic strategy in its emphasis on industrialization and factory labor. This program of development worked out conveniently for the manufacturers in urban centers such as New York City where the demand for laborers was high after World War II. This mid-century pattern of migration set the stage for future waves of migration that occurred during and after the intensification of neoliberal economic policies on

the island. While emigration from the island decreased during the brief economic upturn after the establishment Section 936, it picked up again in the 1980s and later occurred at an unprecedented rate after the phasing out of Section 936 in 2006 (Cabán 180; Duany 37).

In contrast to how immigration patterns began in Puerto Rico, large-scale Dominican migration began a couple of decades later and was first inspired by the unstable political and economic situation following the end of Trujillo's dictatorship in 1961. During this time, the United States occupied the nation for the second time and encouraged emigration from the island as a way to relieve political and economic tensions, seeking to prevent the country from becoming another Communist stronghold like the one in Cuba at the time (Grosfoguel and Georas 109). Economic factors in the mid to late 1960s, a harsh decline in the agricultural economy put a strain on rural populations in the Dominican Republic, which left for city centers on the island and later to both San Juan and New York throughout the 1970s (Duany 58). In other words, the Dominican Republic went through an accelerated version of process of modernization that Puerto Rico experienced in the 1940s and 1950s (Grosfoguel and Georas 111). Throughout the aforementioned economic crisis of the 1980s and the 1990s there was a sustained migration flow in the first decade that spiked in the second decade. During this time, generalized economic crisis, the development of a tourism and manufacturing industries that were unable to accommodate all of those displaced by the loss of the agricultural economy, and the destabilization of the manufacturing economy in the U.S all contributed to an increase in Dominican immigration that was not accommodated by the U.S. economic programs in the same way that Puerto Rican immigration had been when it was orchestrated as part of Operation Bootstrap decades before.⁵

⁵ See, for example, Guerra 34-35 for a description of the way that Cold War politics and anti-Communism in the U.S. not only led to the 1965 U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic and an initial wave of Dominican

Described in this way, the historical chains of events leading to migration from both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic share many similarities. Namely, in both cases, large-scale patterns of displacement were caused by economic upheaval created through U.S. intervention in politics and neoliberal policies. In the Dominican works considered in this project, it is this internal economic exclusion of Dominican laborers who are framed as expendable and deportable—in contrast to Puerto Rican laborers—that tends to underly the representations of Dominican staged migration narratives.

Migration and Labor in U.S. History

On the receiving end of these waves of migration, laws and policies governing immigration to the United States have long depended on the vacillations of the available labor force. A brief historical survey of these laws and policies helps to further highlight the rhetoric of labor productivity that has always accompanied debates over who deserves inclusion in the nation. It also helps to further clarify the economic relationships between Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, quota systems, and labor programs that have long been based on specifying both acceptable kinds of bodies—under the guise of nationality—and preferred kinds of laborers. As early as the late nineteenth century, labor shortages due to the Civil War were addressed through an act designed to allow the contracting of foreign laborers prior to their arrival in the U.S., and a “commissioner of immigration” was appointed (Pew Research Center). In the early part of the twentieth century, a series of legalization programs enacted through quotas favored primarily immigrants of European descent, precluding those from other countries in North and

migration to the U.S. but were also at least partially responsible for the lack of integrating infrastructure and programs available to Dominicans upon arrival in the U.S, also see Grosfoguel and Georas 109-11 for an analysis of Caribbean immigration to New York that draws on of coloniality to argue that Puerto Ricans arriving in New York were racialized and relegated to the low-wage sector following a similar pattern to African Americans before them and then Dominicans, who arrived in a later wave, were racialized following this Puerto Rican pattern.

South America (L. Chávez 27). These programs culminated in the Immigration Act of 1924, which expressly favored agricultural laborers and those with direct relatives already living in the United States (Immigration).⁶ This trend toward normalizing the influx of immigrant laborers in order to supplement the agricultural economy as needed was famously solidified in 1942 with the establishment of the Bracero program, an agreement between Mexico and the U.S. that provided employment, transportation, and living expenses to temporary agricultural laborers (Pew Research Center). Before the termination of this program in 1964, the 1950s and early 1960s saw the emergence of special visas for immigrants designated as refugees—first generally speaking, and then with Cuba specifically in mind (Pew Research Center). As the Bracero program came to an end, in 1965, the Hart-Celler Act did away with the quota system that favored some nationalities over others and instead replaced it with a system that partially emphasized the preferability of skilled immigrants (Pew Research Center)⁷. While this law originally excluded immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, amendments added in the late 1970s did put a limit on the guestworker visas available to laborers from that region (Pew Research Center, Massey and Pren). This trend of basing visa numbers mainly on employment status and family connections continued through the 1980s and 1990s with the Simpson-Mazzoli Act and the Immigration Act of 1990 (Pew Research Center).⁸ The history of U.S. immigration law and

⁶ The act reads in part: “In the issuance of immigration visas to quota immigrants preference shall be given... To a quota immigrant who is the unmarried child under 21 years of age, the father, the mother, the husband, or the wife, of a citizen of the United States who is 21 years of age or over; and... To a quota immigrant who is skilled in agriculture, and his wife, and his dependent children under the age of 16 years, if accompanying or following to join him...” (Immigration 155). It is interesting to note that the Dominican Republic was excluded from these quota restrictions due to the U.S. occupation of the island during this time, although this did not lead to a notable spike in emigration.

⁷ According to the law itself, “The term ‘profession’ shall include but not be limited to architects, engineers, lawyers, physicians, surgeons, and teachers in elementary or secondary schools, colleges, academies, or seminaries” (Hart 917).

⁸ According to the Pew Research Center, the Simpson-Mazzoli Act created a “pathway to permanent residency to unauthorized immigrant workers who lived in the U.S. since 1980s or worked in certain agricultural jobs.” It also

policies has been very specific in its preferred immigrant type—even aside from the widely acknowledged racialized aspect of this history that was explicitly addressed by the Hart-Celler Act in 1965.⁹ The most favored immigrants are those who, in addition to having strong family ties or refugee status, can prove their value as productive laborers.

On top of this general relationship between U.S. immigration policy and migrant labor, the time period that is the main focus in this project, the late 1980s and 1990s, was a time of the intensification of the relationship between this policy and the framing of immigrants as worthy of citizenship and rights due to a willingness to work. In part, this began in 1976 as, for the first time in U.S. history, the Western Hemisphere—meaning all of Latin America—lost its exemption to the preference system which was established to privilege the arrival of skilled immigrants. More importantly, a decade later in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed which not only provided a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who had lived in the U.S. since 1982 but also created the H-2A visa for hiring seasonal agricultural workers and imposed strict sanctions on employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers (Pew Research). This resulted in a shift in U.S. immigration policy toward a pattern of the criminalization of undocumented individuals and those that engaged with them. If, as Shannon Gleeson argues, framing claims to citizenship in terms of economic contribution is a hallmark of citizenship during neoliberal times (400), then this policy shift in the mid-1980s can be arguably seen as part and parcel of this larger economic regime. As Gleeson also notes, this becomes even more important after 9/11 as attempts to counteract

included special provisions for seasonal agricultural laborers and could be applied to the families of these laborers. The Immigration Act of 1990 made further specifications regarding “family-sponsored visas” and “employment-based visas” (Pew Research Center).

⁹ Correcting many decades of policy, the Hart-Celler Act in part declares that “no person shall receive any preference or priority or be discriminated against in the issuance of an immigrant visa because of his race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence...” (911).

anxieties about criminals and terrorists cross U.S. borders tended to focus on valorizing immigrant laborers as good with work being a main virtue (403). While IRCA is only explicitly referenced in one of the works—in José Luis Ramos Escobar’s *Indocumentados: El otro merengue* from Chapter 1—I incorporate the impact of this increasingly naturalized association between labor and discourses around citizenship and belonging of Latinx individuals and migrants regardless of legal citizenship status.

Precarious Aesthetics

Theater and performance have long been regarded as aesthetic space where political and ethical connections among bodies are highlighted, interrogated and reimagined. As theater and performance in the Western tradition shifted away from its social role as a one-way pedagogical tool or mode of entertainment through the influence of practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, the importance of the body onstage in facilitating the active participation of the spectator became a key feature. For Brecht, each “gestus” used by an actor, as a combination of gesture and tone that communicate the attitude of a character, communicates to the audience about a social relation in that it highlights “what happens *between* people” (Brecht 200), thus centering on relation rather than the individual. In contrast to Brecht’s focus on activating the thinking brain, Artaud’s “theater of cruelty,” in which the actor’s athleticism is key to creating the primary effect of agitation meant to “attack the spectator’s sensibility on all sides...instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds” (Artaud 86), frames the experience of a work of theater and performance as a kind of collective awakening. And Grotowski, for whom “the core of the theatre is encounter” (56), theorized theater in and of itself as what takes place when all props and gimmicks are stripped away leaving only the actor’s body on the stage in this encounter with the audience. While there is a

lot that might divide these theater theorists and practitioners conceptually and in terms of goals for their work, one notable general shift within this genealogy as compared to practitioners that came before them was a focus on the important role of the body on the stage for facilitating a relationship with spectators that created some sort of impact beyond the bounds of the narrative being staged. The impact of all these theorists on the plays and works of performance considered in this project is seen to varying degrees as some works, like the ones considered in Chapter 1, rely on Brechtian techniques in conjunction with more traditional theatrical realism while others from Chapters 2 and 3 emphasize the power of the presence of a single body onstage in a more Grotvoskian or Artaudian fashion.

While it is not my intention in this project to provide an exhaustive account of the influence of these theorists on the works considered in this chapter, recalling the impact of these strains of theory on the theatrical genealogies of the works considered in this project sets the stage for thinking through the importance of the concept “precarious aesthetics” in terms of both form and content throughout the following chapters. This concept is useful to this project in the following ways:

First, including the concept of the “precarious” is helpful as a frame for analyzing the way that the works taken up in this project highlight the theme of precarious labor in a neoliberal context. In the last decade, there has been a trend in global theater research related to neoliberalism of employing the term “precarity” in order to capture the condition of the laborer in a post-Fordist economy characterized to an unprecedented extent by flexible and contingent labor, increased anxiety about the presence of non-citizen laborers, terror and debt.¹⁰ While

¹⁰ For a sampling of materials that expand on each of these individual topics in relation to the concept of “precarity,” see Neilson and Rossiter 52; Nyong'o 158; Ridout and Schneider 7; and Jackson 11.

“precarity” is often used to refer to multiple modes of labor under neoliberalism—from gig economy work to work in maquilas—due to its applicability to what some argue is a globally generalizable experience-in-common of labor under neoliberalism, precarity is not experienced by all laborers in the same way. Shannon Gleeson argues, for example, that undocumented status could be considered what she labels a “precarity multiplier” (*Precarious Claims* 7) due to the way it affects an individual’s access to safe workplace conditions, legal recourse and social programs. For the purposes of this project, I find it helpful to expand on this concept and consider in my analyses of the different kinds of staged migrant laborers the varying degrees to which not only undocumented status but also non-citizen status more broadly—as well as unequal citizenship status in the case of Puerto Rico—all act to multiply the effects of precarity under neoliberalism.¹¹

Second, the concept of “precarious aesthetics” is a helpful framework for approaching the works included in this project on an aesthetic level with a special attention to the way that form and affect highlight the economic precarity of the migrant laborers staged in these works. My understanding of aesthetics in this sense finds its foundation in Jacques Rancière’s conceptualization of “the sensible” from *The Politics of Aesthetics*. For Rancière, aesthetics can be understood broadly as the way that form determines what is “sensible”—in other words perceptible via one of the senses, with sight and hearing being specifically privileged in his theorization (7-8). What links all of the varied works considered in the chapters below is a theorization of the impact of neoliberalism and the way that it orders bodies and perceptions according to its own logic. An attention to form, genre and affect in combination with one another allows me to highlight this impact through attending to what and who is made sensible

¹¹ I take this particular language of “unequal citizenship” in relation to Puerto Rican citizenship status from Fernández’s study of mid-century Mexican and Puerto Rican Labor in the Chicago area.

through this combination. Candice Amich's work on "precarious forms" addresses this in part when she highlights the way that a particular strain of contemporary Latin American theater and performance works to "defamiliarize mainstream narratives of globalization" (14) by disrupting what she labels the "neoliberal sensorium" (4). However, where Amich's work focuses on returning to specific scenes of collective trauma that have resulted to some degree from the establishment of the neoliberal regime, I am more interested in the everyday experience of economic structures in the Caribbean. To this end, a focus on labor and migration is appropriate as it links the consideration of neoliberalism to the day-to-day life in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Third, the "precarious aesthetics" of this project works not only as a reference to the precarity associated with the laborer under neoliberalism but also as a recognition of the fragility of the aesthetic experience of many of the works under analysis here that make an appeal on an affective level to audiences. Even where form is understood in a less experimental way in some of the works considered in this project, an attention to what aspects of migrant labor under a neoliberal regime are made sensible to audiences and what kind of response might be expected from spectators is key to my analysis.

Methodology

Since the foundation of a transnational theater tradition between the Hispanophone Caribbean and the continental U.S. was initiated by the first staging of René Marqués' *La carreta* in 1953 at the Church of San Sebastian in New York, Puerto Rican theater has been a transnational affair. Moreover, as Nicolás Kanellos notes, it initiated a new stage in both Puerto Rican and Hispanic theater that took seriously "dramatic material based on the history, language and culture of the working-class communities" ("Hispanic Theatre" 202). The Puerto Rican

works taken up in this project are a part of this performance genealogy both in their staging of transnational ties resulting from the movement of labor under a neoliberal regime and in their ties to a tradition of theater that takes the concerns of laborers into account. The Dominican theater practitioners under analysis in this project form a part of this genealogy as well. As scholars such as Camilla Stevens and James Hundley have noted in their research, the Dominican theater tradition after Trujillo developed through the transnational movement of practitioners between the island and the U.S. after the large wave of Dominican migration to the U.S. in the 1980s.¹² Moreover, according to Stevens, the “New Latinos” who arrived in waves in the 1980s and 1990s—Dominicans, Salvadoran, Colombians, etc.—were less likely to form separate theater companies and cultural spaces due to socioeconomic circumstances and instead integrated into pre-existing Hispanic theater groups in New York City, for example (“Aquí and Allá” 23-25). Transnational connections—both in terms of content dealing with migrant labor and in terms of staging and the travel of theater and performance practitioners—is a defining feature that unites the works under consideration in this project and one to which I pay close attention throughout. The works included span multiple genres from traditional theater and performance art to film and installation art. All have been formally staged—often both on their respective island and within the continental U.S. While my method of analysis has focused on written scripts—sometimes published and sometimes not, I have supplemented this with video and photographic material whenever possible as the presence of the body onstage is key to my analysis. The relationship between bodies onstage and the audience—whether observed in video material or imagined based on dialogue and didascalia—are at the forefront of my analysis.

¹² See, for example, Hundley’s PhD dissertation and article “Travelling the Guagua Aérea: The Transnational Journeys of Dominican Performance,” which trace the transnational journeys of Dominican theater practitioners; see Stevens’ *Aquí and Allá: Transnational Dominican Theater and Performance* for a detailed account of the way contemporary Dominican theater theorizes in relation to the Dominican nation-state.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1. Staging Failed Labor Migrations in the Post-*La carreta* Caribbean

In the first chapter of this project, which provides a historical foundation for the following chapters, I use René Marqués play *La carreta*, a seminal work dealing with (im)migration between the Caribbean and the United States, in comparison with later works of theater that are indebted to this play in some way to explore the larger implications of the shift toward neoliberalism in the post-1950s Caribbean. The three works under consideration in this chapter, which include Roberto Ramos Perea's *Malasangre: La nueva emigración*, José Luis Ramos Escobar's *Indocumentados: El otro merengue* and Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a piece-work*, highlight the failures of both neoliberal and nationalist frameworks while also staging the material consequences of these frameworks for the migrant laborers they mobilize. These three works exhibit typical characteristics of a migration narrative tradition that ties them to *La carreta* while also responding to their own context of during the 1980s—a key moment for the crystallization of neoliberal policies around the globe. Because both aesthetically and affectively these works diverge from this oft-repeated migration narrative by highlighting a sort of stalemate rather than either the arousal of nostalgic desire for the homeland or the foregrounded criticism of assimilation in the United States, I propose that the migration journeys in these plays are better understood in terms of impasse and failure. In *Malasangre*, the Puerto Rican migrant protagonists find themselves stuck between the failed promises of both island and mainland as they look for job opportunities. In *Indocumentados*, the undocumented Dominican protagonist is doomed to the same fate as the Puerto Rican man whose identity he adopts as both become equally trapped—in spite of their differential citizenship status—in a circular migration narrative with no clear opportunity or escape. In *Por hora*, the undocumented Dominican protagonist is

caught between an impossible future in the United States and the need to imagine the Dominican Republic otherwise in order for it to offer a sustainable future. In other words, these three plays dwell on the emerging impasse experienced by workers under a global system of trade, capital, and labor governed by the tenants of neoliberalism.

However, rather than languishing in the impasse, each of the works also uses theater to imagine how these staged failures might gesture toward decolonial possibilities found in kinds of solidarity that differ from the neoliberal and heteropatriarchal norm. Drawing theoretically on Lauren Berlant, Tony Fisher and Jack Halberstam in conjunction with the theatrical tradition of social realism helps to illuminate how this happens in each work. Berlant's theorization of the concept of "impasse" as related to the situation of a crisis-made-ordinary provides a vocabulary for analyzing the effect of the entrenchment of neoliberalism on the characters in the three plays. Tony Fisher's further theorization of what he calls a "theater of impasse" helps to articulate an aesthetic experience of these aspects of "impasse" within a theater setting. However, in contrast to this sense of stuckness, Halberstam's theorization of "failure" provides language for what moving past an impasse might look like. Halberstam suggests that failure can have a decolonizing connotation—a "conterhegemonic mode" (89)—in its association with "nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive lifestyles, negativity, and critique" (89). In this way, failure can result in an impasse within a given system while simultaneously opening up other possibilities. To this end, the plays couple social realism with elements that draw audiences into this sense of a crisis that has become ordinary and that must simply be endured while also leaving space, however temporary and fleeting it may be, for failure to open space for imagining possibilities for solidarity that differ from the neoliberal norm.

Chapter 2. Together in the Hold: Solo Performance Art in the Puerto Rican and Dominican Diasporas

This chapter turns to solo performances in the Puerto Rican and Dominican diasporas that claim space for the emergence of new ways of relating and belonging that exist outside the market-based logic of productivity that has come to dominate under neoliberalism. In terms of genre, I turn specifically to what feminist performance theorist Jill Dolan calls the “polymonologue,” a solo performance that may incorporate multiple languages and involves the embodiment of more than one cultural identity. Drawing on both Caribbean ontologies and queer approaches to performance, I seek to reevaluate the possibilities of this genre in terms of contemporary Caribbean performance in the time of neoliberal logic. By putting three solo performances under consideration in this chapter in conversation with these theoretical concepts, I seek to address the larger matter of the totalizing pervasiveness of market logic—here coded as a demand for productivity—by positing the space of the performance event as one where the reconfiguration of affective connections can take place.

The solo performances taken up in this chapter are *You Don't Look Like...* by Puerto Rican artist Javier Cardona, *Dominicanish* by Dominican artist Josefina Báez, and *Mondongo Scam* by Dominican artist Claudio Mir. All three of these works demonstrate an awareness of the way that immigrants to the United States are framed in terms of a demand for productivity. In response, they all also employ anti-inclusionist performance strategies that are laden with queer potentiality. I ultimately suggest an understanding of solo performance in the Puerto Rican and Dominican diasporas in the U.S. as an aesthetic model that seeks to emphasize affective strategies for building coalition and community outside the bounds of market logic.

While the term “queer” can be used in many different ways, I follow Muñoz, Chávez and De Genova in perceiving queerness as a way of existing in the present that gestures toward a real

but so far unrealized way of relating. This queerness is, however, inflected by a Caribbean ontological approach as I draw Dolan's concept of the polymonologue into dialogue with Glissant's theory of opacity, which, in short, can be understood as a rejection of a Western drive toward hierarchies based on discovery-driven thinking that requires the "other" to be transparent to "me" in an oversimplified and reductive way and a prioritization of a mode of relation that preserves an other's right to opacity, or the right to remain unknowable to "me." In each of the three works, the multiple changes in character performed by the solo performance artist onstage draws spectators into an encounter with an opaque and invites them through an embodied aesthetics to consider alternative modes of relation and solidarity that look beyond the limited hope of inclusionary politics.

Chapter 3. The Erotic Ethics of Tactile Textiles in Contemporary Caribbean Performance

This chapter focuses on a series of works that demonstrate the prevalence with which Puerto Rican and Dominican theater and performance engage with the affective connections invoked through the presence of textile as an object that mediates the connection between work, audience, and the history of garment industry labor in the Caribbean. It specifically takes up the film short *Ciudadana* which was directed by Llaima Sanfiorenzo with a performance by Yari Helfeld, the play *La otra orilla* by Teatro Pregones, the play *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)* by Chiqui Vicioso, and the installation and performance piece *Siboney* by Joiri Minaya. It centers the way that the presence of textile in these works facilitates an encounter with a precarious other that invites spectators to imagine a reconfiguration of the way that neoliberalism orders bodies on a global scale and holds them in their place. This is not to say that the pieces under consideration here fall into moral didacticism but that, rather than prescribing a specific moral imperative, they all, to a certain extent, participate in a Levinasian mode of "performance as

ethical practice” (Ridout 54). Specifically, I argue that using texture and textile onstage, these works invite spectators into an encounter with a displaced other whose labor made the palpable existence of the prop or set piece possible. Moreover, I argue that, through employing what I call an “erotic ethics,” this encounter invites spectators to reorient their understanding of their everyday interactions with garments and textile in a way that challenges the distance between laborer and consumer and the diffuse sense of responsibility that this distance implies.

In this chapter, I am interested in the way that textile onstage both references a general neoliberal context that naturalizes the invisibilization of the labor of certain hands by the distancing at the core of supply chain and the logistical dynamics within the global garment industry. Simultaneously, I am interested in the way that the aesthetics of cloth onstage appeals to multiple senses, mediating spectators’ encounter with the laboring others always already implied in the existence of textile and inviting them to consider their ethical responsibility toward and connection to these others.

Like Mimi Sheller’s “erotic agency,” which draws heavily on Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic as a non-western and embodied foundation for empowerment and which emphasizes subaltern practices of freedom that challenge conventional forms of political agency, the “erotic ethics” I propose comes “from below” in the sense that it originates with subaltern or invisibilized subjects as well as emphasizing often ignored forms of embodied connections with others. These embodied connections are the ones always already present in but often underacknowledged in the textiles we interact with every day. The works show how textile, as a textured object, connects spectators to implied laboring others that have already touched and worked on the objects onstage previous to the encounter. Moreover, as they activate the immediate connection between seeing cloth and our sense of touch, they prompt audiences to

consider the way the feel of the textile onstage extends to the cloth—and clothes—they touch every day. And they do this within a larger context of neoliberalism in a way that disrupts the way this economic system holds bodies at a distance and within a specific hierarchy that determines differential levels of vulnerability and visibility.

Chapter 1: Staging Failed Labor Migrations in the Post-*La carreta* Caribbean

Introduction

Like the history of René Marqués' migration-themed play, *La carreta*, the history of migration between the Caribbean and the United States bears the weight of the transition between a Fordist economic structure, characterized by the metaphor of the factory, and neoliberalism, which introduces new levels of precarity into the life of the migrant worker. In the case of Puerto Rico, for example, by the time of the premiere of René Marqués' *La carreta* in 1953, official colonial ties with Spain had been severed and a new colonial relationship with the United States had been formalized through the island's status as an Estado Libre Asociado, as well as through the economic policies associated with Operation Bootstrap. These policies centered on modernizing and industrializing the Puerto Rican economy, a process that drew large numbers of agricultural laborers to urban areas in Puerto Rico and, when those jobs were exhausted, to the urban United States, where the labor surplus still failed to be absorbed. *La carreta* represents this economic context in what another Puerto Rican playwright, José Luis Ramos Escobar, calls "...las tres etapas del vía crucis puertorriqueño..." ("Teatro nacional" 154). The work introduces a Puerto Rican migrant family that abandons their failing farm to first migrate to San Juan where, according to the eldest son, Luis, "...hay oportunidad pa toh. Donde no hay que ser un trapo e peón pa vivir" (Marqués, *La carreta* 23). His hopes for better opportunities in San Juan are soon undermined, and the family must make its way to the Bronx, where Luis is killed by one of the machines at his factory job—literally consumed by Pachín Marín's figurative nineteenth century New York, which he imagined as "...un horrible monstruo ocupado constantemente de tragar y vomitar a la vez seres humanos..." (200). While Marín ends on a more hopeful note as his narrator exits a restaurant praising "...el verdadero Nueva York, el

Nueva York sabio y bueno, hospitalario y alegre...” (201), *La carreta* offers only the solution of return—not only to the island but also to a nostalgic time before the process of modernization had even begun. One of the most iconic passages from the play, spoken by the mother, Doña Gabriela, addresses both this tragic hopelessness and this nostalgia through a highly emotional appeal: “Porque ahora me doy cuenta lo que noh pasaba a toh. ¡La mardisión de la tierra! La tierra es sagrá. La tierra no se abandona. Hay que volver a lo que dejamoh pa que no noh persiga máh la mardisión de la tierra” (Marqués 171). In this way, as many scholars have concluded, *La carreta* easily lends itself to an interpretation as a warning against cultural assimilation and the dissolution of national culture, which here lead to both moral deterioration and death.¹³ Given the fact that both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic have experienced this same scenario of accelerated modernization in separate historical moments, I am interested in a focus that transcends the bounds of the nation, seeking to understand the way that works that form part of its legacy of *La carreta* reveal the larger implications of the changing economic structure within a post-1950s Puerto Rican and Dominican context.

In this sense, *La carreta* itself is a useful point of departure for this chapter. While the Puerto Rican and Dominican works under consideration here are more contemporary, they are all indebted to *La carreta*—however indirectly—at both a thematic and a formal level. While *La carreta* explores the impact of the initial stages of modernization on Puerto Rico and is concerned with an abstractly national agenda, the plays featured in this chapter were written during a time when neoliberalism had firmly taken hold in the Caribbean and engage with its

¹³ As Juan Flores summarizes in his *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*, “The ‘oxcart,’ guiding symbol of the play and an abiding reminiscence of abandoned national roots, must be restored to its natural place in a world uncontaminated by inhuman modernity and incompatible foreign values” (Flores 169). For René Marqués himself, the work gave dramatic form to the “tendencia suicida” (162) that, according to his famous essay, “El puertorriqueño dócil,” is a destructive tendency that is the essence of Puerto Rican psychology (Romero 90).

economic policies with the same kind of critical eye. In terms of structure, the plays do share with *La carreta* a similar concern with the conditions that lead to emigration and the development of circumstances that provoke a real or desired return journey. Moreover, like *La carreta*, each of the three plays considered in this chapter—Roberto Ramos Perea’s *Malasangre: La nueva emigración*, José Luis Ramos Escobar’s *Indocumentados: El otro merengue* and Elizabeth Ovalle’s *Por hora y a piece-work*—were written by playwrights that were living at the time in either Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic rather than on the mainland. However, where in the conclusion of *La carreta* the only antidote to the tragedy of migration and attempted assimilation into mainland U.S. culture is a return to a nostalgic iteration of Puerto Rican national identity symbolized by the planned return of the jíbaro characters to a rural, idealized and pre-Operation Bootstrap version of Puerto Rico, in the three works considered at length in this chapter, this nationalistic optimism about and confidence in the possibility of return to the nation is no longer a focus. While, similar to *La carreta*, the three plays are structured around varying forms of an indictment of a neoliberal economic system that both requires and exploits migrant labor as well as framing the decision to migrate as a moral failure in the sense that it is at least partly connotated within each work as a betrayal of national identity and autonomy, return is no longer as imaginable as it was decades before.

With this distinction in mind, this chapter analyzes how, in contrast to *La carreta*, the three plays situate themselves between the failures of both neoliberal and nationalist frameworks, staging their material consequences for the migrant laborers they mobilize. My argument in this chapter is three-fold: First, I argue that each play situates its characters as stuck between two impossible choices—between the whims of a now-entrenched neoliberal economic system and

the unfeasibility of the autonomous nation state.¹⁴ Second, while each play also tentatively gestures toward the possibility of a way out of this stuckness, I argue that it is the resulting affective state from this precarious situation that comes to define these migration plays under a neoliberal regime. Third, while all of the plays are relatively traditional in terms of form, drawing on the same tradition of realism as *La carreta* in the sense that they take up the issue of working class life and replicate rather than poeticizing the registers of speech of their characters, I argue that they use the formal elements of this style of theater—in some cases alongside others—to stage the embodiment of this affective state. The first work, *Malasangre: La nueva emigración* by Roberto Ramos-Perea, was first staged in 1987 and explores the way that emigration patterns have changed since earlier decades—the protagonists leave the island for El Paso rather than New York—and makes explicit connections to *La carreta*, creating a comparison between the impact of the “old” and “new” emigration from the island. *Indocumentados: El otro merengue*, written by another Puerto Rican playwright, José Luis Ramos Escobar and first staged in 1989, features another characteristic of the “new” emigration by highlighting a Dominican protagonist that passes as Puerto Rican in order to find work in New York. Finally, *Por hora y a piece-work*, by Dominican playwright Elizabeth Ovalle and first premiered in Santo Domingo in 1993 explores the difficulties of an undocumented Dominican female worker that moves to New York to find work in the garment industry so that she can support her family back on the island. In spite of the fact that they feature migrants

¹⁴ While I acknowledge that the politically dependent status of Puerto Rico always already complicates the idea of Puerto Rican autonomy, as I outline in the introduction, the entrenchment of neoliberalism in Puerto Rico during the late 1980s and early 1990s via the investment of U.S. continental firms that resulted in the removal of capital from the island further complicated chances for Puerto Rican political or cultural autonomy. This is the context that I am interested in for the purposes of analysis here.

whose citizenship statuses are not equivalent and who therefore are not evenly exposed to the whims of neoliberalism, together these plays capture the experience of a common affective state.

The Real(ist) Migrant Experience

Before, turning to the theoretical framework for my analysis, a brief contextualization in terms of genre helps to illuminate how the kind of realism featured in these plays contributes to the feeling of stuckness I describe above. All of the plays draw in one way or another on a tradition of social realism, a theatrical sub-genre known for its social commitment and belief in the ability to confront audiences with the truth of their social situations. In doing so, they engage with a long history of social realist representations while exploring its limitations and opening space for the possibility of solidarity on different terms.

As regards the Puerto Rican works considered in this chapter, *Malasangre, la nueva emigración* and *Indocumentados: El otro merengue*, the role of social realism is further foregrounded by their belonging to what many Puerto Rican practitioners called “la nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña,” which roughly corresponds to the late 1970s and entire 1980s. The aesthetic projects of these two works requires exploring the way that the play sought to pay homage to a tradition of national theater, reaffirming the importance of the dramatic text, while also being indebted to a new iteration of social realist tradition of theater on the island.¹⁵ These works represent the culmination of two stages of this “nueva dramaturgia”—the first being one of revolutionary optimism and the second one of a more jaded perspective that seeks to frame its revolutionary impulse in a less idealistic way. It first grew out of the radical and revolutionary politics of the 1960s and 1970s and resulted in a reactionary theater that engaged directly with

¹⁵ In fact, Ramos Escobar refers to Ramos-Perea’s work as “neo-realismo social” in his chapter “Compendio histórico (1966-1988)” (199).

the social and political concerns of the time. On the mainland, these decades would be associated with the nationalist politics of the Young Lords, who, active in the Bronx, modeled their activism on the Black Panthers.¹⁶ Their political platform included a demand for Puerto Rico's self-determination, and they even initiated an eventually unsuccessful plan to open up branches of the party in Puerto Rico (Meléndez 193). On the island, in addition to the independence movement, which was reaching its revolutionary peak, militant student groups such as the Federación Universitaria Pro Independencia (FUPI) were organizing in opposition to the Vietnam War draft and more generally against the presence of the ROTC on Puerto Rican university campuses.¹⁷ As Ramos-Perea explains in his 1984 manifesto, the early central focus of the dramaturgia was to reflect Puerto Rican social reality as a "fotografía cruda" ("Los manifiestos" 147) in order to expose it on the stage to social critique.¹⁸ Both Ramos-Perea and Ramos Escobar affirmed the relationship between this strategy and a rupture with entrenched traditional theatrical and

¹⁶ See for example Meléndez's account of how the Young Lords based their anti-drug campaigns on the theories of Black Panther Michael Tabor (177).

¹⁷ As Aurther Liebman notes in his 1971 study of "The Student Left in Puerto Rico," there had long been opposition to the idea of Puerto Ricans being drafted by a government in which they were not officially represented (179). It is also worth noting that the participation of Puerto Ricans in U.S. wars has been contentious since the passing of the Jones Act in 1917, under which Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship. Shortly after the passage of this act, the U.S. joined in the action of WWI. The correlation of these two events led some to claim that military recruitment was behind the legislation, although scholars have since shown the probability that it was instead primarily motivated by the need to stifle the independence movement on the island (Black, "San Juan" 21-22).

¹⁸ In tune with the revolutionary zeal of the political moment, Ramos-Perea's 1984 manifesto declares: Hoy por hoy, el nuevo dramaturgo vive más en la calle, en el barrio, en el caserío, en la huelga de la universidad, en la cárcel, del brazo del tecato, en el terreno rescatado, vive más en el Vieques militarizado,¹⁸ en los laberintos del crimen organizado, en la fila del desempleo, en la guagua, en la calle Vendig y Santa Rita, en la línea de piquete, en Villa Sin Miedo, en el Cerro Maravilla, en la calle San Sebastián, en los muelles, en la construcción, en la represión: vive más en el Puerto Rico verdadero y no se escuda con él ni proletariza su definición, sino que lo entiende y lo traduce. El nuevo dramaturgo no es lámina de libro, es fotografía cruda. ("Los manifiestos" 147)

With this list of everyday places and sociopolitical problems, Ramos-Perea evokes the "fotografía cruda" that metaphorizes his initial theater aesthetic, which confidently claims the ability to reflect—like a non-stylized photograph—and critique the truth of Puerto Rican sociopolitical realities.

political systems.¹⁹ Into the 1980s, “la nueva dramaturgia” began to shift focus away from complete rupture and toward a navigation of their relationship with the order and structure of previous generations of playwrights.²⁰ According to Ramos-Perea, to ameliorate the improvisational chaos inspired by the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the text took on a new importance as both the organizing force and lasting mark on the world.²¹ Articulated in this way, the generation of playwrights active in the 1980s in Puerto Rico stands out in its dependence on the social realist tradition as a way to reconcile revolutionary desire with a desire for the discipline and order of the patriarchal nation—a topic that will come up again as I move to talk about the plays themselves.

Beyond this connection of *Malasangre* and *Indocumentados* with “la nueva dramaturgia” in Puerto Rico, all three works considered in this chapter—Puerto Rican and Dominican alike—are situated within the tradition of Spanish-language Latin American and Latinx literature about

¹⁹ Ramos-Perea goes as far to claim a rupture with past theater traditions and progression toward something new political and artistic forms, saying, “Cualquier nueva dramaturgia es siempre un grito de revolución, un cambio y una terrible ruptura con lo tradicional” (“La función” 19). For “los nuevos dramaturgos,” this rupture was with all established political systems, which lead Ramos Escobar to define the movement as “un cuestionamiento del entorno social, el compromiso ideológico con la independencia de Puerto Rico pero sin la militancia política de los 70, la búsqueda de las conciencias conflictivas de los personajes, en aras de evitar el maniqueísmo de muchas obras anteriores del teatro popular, y el retorno a la estructura de acción” (“Compendio” 199).

²⁰ By the 1980s, the optimism of the initial revolutionary hopes for the future had waned and theater practitioners and theorists began to frame the idea of a complete rupture with the past as both an impossibility and as something undesirable.²⁰ It is impossible in the sense that playwright Teresa Marichal expresses when she insists, “Se ha dicho que existe una nueva dramaturgia porque los escritores que pertenecemos a este movimiento, escribimos sobre aspectos y temas que otras generaciones no escribieron. Siempre he creído que no hay nada bajo el sol, de que lo único nuevo que hay, somos las personas que caminamos debajo de él” (295). Complementing the way that Marichal underscores here the impossibility of finding “lo nuevo” in theater themes and forms, something also emphasized by Ramos-Perea in his “(Tercer) Manifiesto,” which was also published in 1987, “la nueva dramaturgia” began to favor a closer connection to previous theater traditions. For example, scholar Josemilio González emphasizes the importance of engaging with both historical and present-day problems in his 1987 essay “Hacia un Nuevo Teatro Puertorriqueño.”

²¹ Both these discouraging economic and political realities and aesthetic concerns that have begun to reengage with the past converge in several moments throughout Ramos-Perea’s “(Tercer) Manifiesto.” Referencing the aftermath of the Vietnam War, he looks back with a critical eye at what he perceives to be the chaos of the first iterations of “la nueva dramaturgia,” declaring, “Al final de la Guerra de Vietnam las cosas tomaron un silencioso, pero nuevo orden. Aquellos años de caos nos habían llevado muy cerca de la improvisación, del escamoteo, a la falta de mesura, al grito irracional de ‘libertad’ con que defendíamos nuestra imprudencia” (148).

immigration that further underscores this social realist impulse in its depiction of the immigrant experience. Nicolás Kanellos provides an extensive study of immigrant literature that has been written since the United States' territorial acquisition of the late 1800s, emphasizing the common reliance in these narratives on the deconstruction of the myth of the American Dream through an emphasis on the cruel treatment and difficult experiences faced by Latin American immigrants to the United States. Kanellos draws on a framework of analysis that is similar to Diana Taylor's articulation of the "scenario," an embodied plot device that underscores the recurrent aspects of situations in which humans find themselves—in real life as well as on the stage.²² He highlights the way that early narratives about immigration relied on a similar plot:

...the economic reasons for leaving home and the expectations of improved wages and working conditions in the United States; the confrontation with the brute realities of quasi-slave labor and working conditions; disillusionment and rejection of the American Dream; and return to the homeland or a loss (often seen as a figurative death) of identity or actual physical death. (55)

In other words, the common immigration "scenario" in these early narratives included the choice to emigrate in search of better wage, the experience of poor labor conditions that call into question the realness of the American Dream, and a either the option to return to the homeland or the experience of loss. Beginning with these early narratives, and even directly evoking *La carreta*, Kanellos identifies a persistent emphasis in Latin American and Latinx immigration literature on the association of loss of culture and identity with moral degradation in that the loss or death at the end is often portrayed as poetic justice for leaving one's nation behind. In the context of Puerto Rican literature and theater, Rolando J. Romero has identified this scenario

²² For Taylor, the concept of a "scenario" captures the way that paradigmatic plots are repeated in a formulaic way that emphasizes both patterns of behavior and constructedness in contrast to the way a "trope" only captures a repeated figure of speech or discourse (13).

with a tradition of authors, such as René Marqués himself, that “moralize migration” (86), emphasizing its connection with Puerto Rico’s failure to strengthen its own national position.

In the Dominican Republic, immigration faces a similar moralizing perception due in part to the historic discourse of the Trujillo regime, which appealed to moralized descriptions of the Dominican family in order to both restrict emigration and encourage population growth on the island (Hernández; Moya Pons). Moreover, under Balaguer’s presidency, emigrants were framed in oppositional terms and emigration was encouraged as a long-term solution for the removal of political dissidents and population control (Hernández 45). This framing also connects with more recent media campaigns sponsored by the U.S. Embassy that framed the travel of undocumented immigrants in yolas [small boats]—through melodramatic evocations of risks such as sharks and starvation—as certain death (Graziano 90). A poster from the campaign that Frank Graziano includes in his study declares, “Los viajes ilegales son viajes a la muerte” (90). In this phrase, the potential poetic justice at the end of the yola voyage—as with earlier kinds of authorized and unauthorized immigration—is a warning to heed. In all of these representations, whether artistic or cultural, choosing immigration becomes a choice to abandon national identity that is often coupled with naturalized material experiences of precarity and even death. In the context of the immigration scenario, then, the use of social realism both emphasizes the gritty common reality of the migration experience and takes a moral position that may undermine the transparency of the reality being represented.

While critiques of the possibility of mimetic representation will not be rehashed in this project, the following analysis keeps in mind that engaging with these works on the basis of the social realist tradition of theater facilitates a consideration of the material reality of the laborers represented onstage. Put another way, works of theater that draw on the social realist tradition

depend on both the staging of scenarios in which a real person could potentially find themselves while also remaining sites that put into play discourses and dynamics that impinge upon these scenarios. In spite of its typical naturalization as an inherent human capacity, Nicholas De Genova helpfully articulates how “‘work’ itself operates ideologically as an ‘American’ value within a moral economy of citizenship, whereby the capacity for labour is affiliated to a competence for self-control, self-government, and rightful citizenship through a kind of labour-republican politics of virtue” (120). In other words, work is not a neutral concept. Hand-in-hand with migration, it is often framed in moralizing terms that in turn determine access to citizenship rights, and this chapter engages with and extends De Genova’s assertion to consider how the laborers onstage in the three plays considered here navigate both national and global formulations of the productive laborer.

Within the neoliberal context under consideration in this project, I would argue that the formal qualities of social realist theater—even if they are lacking in innovation compared to other works from the same period explored in the following chapters—shift slightly in connotation. As Stephen Lacey helpfully summarizes in his book chapter about social realist theater in Great Britain, in addition to emphasizing political commitment, a moralizing impulse and a mimetic connotation, social realism sees itself as “remedying an absence” (58) in terms of previous identities represented on the stage, as illuminating a relationship of causation between individuals and “the determining power of broader social, political and economic forces” (59), and of proposing a metonymic relationship between characters and sets and society as a whole (62). All of the works explored in this chapter share these characteristics as they foreground underprivileged migrant characters that are displaced by socioeconomic forces beyond their control and whose journeys are framed in moral terms as they abandon their national home. This

definition highlights how, while social realism does seek to bring to light causes and concerns that have been previously excluded from both the stage and the national social imaginary, it traditionally stages these concerns as determined by naturalistic and immovable social forces. In contrast to the deterministic tendency associated with social realism, Mark Fisher's definition of "capitalist realism" helps to illuminate a different possible understanding of the same aesthetic features. For Fisher, "capitalist realism" is not confined to art but is instead a "pervasive *atmosphere*" (21) associated with neoliberalism that describes the way that the economic regime presents itself as "real" in the sense of being a naturalized reality that is commonly embraced. When placed in dialogue with the common tenets of social realism, it rubs against the naturalist impulse of the genre. Fisher explains that:

A moral critique of capitalism, emphasizing the ways in which it leads to suffering, only reinforces capitalist realism. Poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naïve utopianism. Capitalist realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if, that is to say, capitalism's ostensible 'realism' turns out to be nothing of the sort. (21)

When read in conjunction with social realism, then, "capitalist realism" highlights the way that the theatrical genre, which does seek to critique the social conditions it stages, can contribute to the reification of the socioeconomic structures that this genre hopes to critique. Seemingly with this pitfall in mind, the plays under analysis in this chapter rely not only on a sometimes-heavy-handed social realism through mimesis and overtly politically charged dialogue but also on Brechtian distancing techniques and other flights of fantasy that work to denaturalize neoliberal iterations of capitalism.

Staging Failed Migrations

While they engage with this social realist tradition and with the migration scenario popularized in *La carreta*, both politically and affectively, the works under consideration in this

chapter diverge from this oft-repeated scenario by underscoring a sort of stalemate rather than the arousal of nostalgic desire for the homeland. With this in mind, I propose that the migration journeys in these plays are better understood in terms of impasse and failure. In *Malasangre*, the Puerto Rican migrant protagonists find themselves stuck between the failed promises of both island and mainland as they look for job opportunities. In *Indocumentados*, the undocumented Dominican protagonist is doomed to the same fate as the Puerto Rican man whose identity he adopts as both become equally trapped—in spite of their differential citizenship status—in a circular migration narrative with no clear opportunity or way out. In *Por hora*, the undocumented Dominican protagonist is caught between an impossible future in the United States and the need to imagine the Dominican Republic otherwise in order for it to offer a sustainable future. In other words, these three plays dwell on the emerging impasse experienced by workers under a global system of trade, capital, and labor governed by the tenants of neoliberalism.

In many ways, the characteristics of impasse described by theorists such as Lauren Berlant and Tony Fisher help to illuminate the connection between the economic and political stalemates represented in the plays taken up in this chapter and what one could call the neoliberal condition. For Berlant, impasse is the defining affective experience of neoliberalism. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant associates impasse with the “attrition of a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life, the good life” (11) in the post-Reagan era when neoliberalism became globally entrenched and the “good life,” imagined in both the terms of the American Dream and in terms of nationalism, falls short. According to Berlant, “...In the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown...(10).” In other words, it is an ongoing experience of crisis characterized by its “stuckness”—something that Berlant also refers to a “crisis-ordinariness” (10)—which results not in solutions that resolve or move beyond crisis but instead

in strategies for getting by in the midst of this crisis. According to Fisher, the “theater of impasse” is specifically characterized by its recognition of and aesthetic immersion of the audience in an experience that highlights how “impasse in the strictest sense is ‘impassable’...It can be suffered or endured or withstood, if one is resilient enough. It cannot be transcended” (Fisher 139-140). For Fisher, as for Berlant, impasse is not something to be overcome; instead, it is survived—an attribute that speaks to the experience of precarity that characterizes neoliberalism. It is this sense of being trapped within the everyday and ongoing crisis of neoliberalism that I argue is evidenced in the plays under consideration here.

However, while the plays considered here draw their audiences into an impasse, they also seem to attribute a much more productive quality to this imagined affective and political space than either Berlant or Fisher deems possible. In a situation in which given sociopolitical, national, transnational, and economic frameworks have failed, they seek different forms of sociality that are outside of the given ones based on normalized economic power structures and heteropatriarchal imaginaries. With this in mind, I am interested in the acts of persistence in the face of failure—as there is no way forward in the metropolis and no way back to a sustainable life in the homeland—highlighted in *Malasangre*, *Indocumentados*, and *Por hora*. If, as Halberstam suggests, failure can have a decolonizing connotation in its association with “nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive lifestyles, negativity, and critique” (89), this chapter seeks to understand to what extent these plays adopt a “counterhegemonic mode” (89) of failure as they break with hegemonic ideals of economic success and productivity. The impasse emerges as a global economic system based on the free movement of capital and labor but detached from immigrant humanity fails to support its ever-implied promises of the good life—or at least a better life. Each of the plays considered in this chapter stage failed

journeys that highlight this impasse, which could be defined in terms of the ongoing experience of this systemic failure. But rather than languishing in the impasse, each of the plays imagines how these staged failures might gesture toward decolonial possibilities found in kinds of solidarity that differ from the capitalist and heteropatriarchal norm.

Waiting and Impasse in *Malasangre, la nueva emigración*

After being staged twice in 1987 and published in 1991, *Malasangre, la nueva emigración* was produced three times between 2007 and 2015, both in Puerto Rico and in the United States.²³ Reviews published after most of these performances highlight how the play tends to be perceived as a repetition of the migration narrative staged in *La carreta*. For example, after the premiere in 1987, a review in *El Mundo, Puerto Rico Ilustrado* compares it to plays featuring the same narrative that came before it, saying, “Pero los problemas siguen siendo los mismos, como se puede ver en *Malasangre*: dominación política, explotación económica, agresión cultural, por los Estados Unidos” (120). The headline of the *New York Times* review of the 2007 staging declares, “Immigration Questions, 20 Years Old but Current.” This historical continuity revealed in the recognizable migration scenario adds a sense of irony to the subtitle that declares the play to be about “la nueva emigración.” Even so, it quickly becomes apparent that continuity also points to a rupture as married protagonists Mario and Luna—a “new” iteration of “la gran familia puertorriqueña”—struggle to incorporate these continually reemerging histories into a plan for a sustainable future.²⁴

²³ After its premiere in 1987 at the Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, it was staged again that same year by Compañía Teatrum (Teatro Universitario del Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez de la Universidad de Puerto Rico). Since its publication in the 1990s, it has been staged in New York by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (2007), at the Teatro del Ateneo Puertorriqueño (2010) and again at the Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez (2015).

²⁴ The trope of “la gran familia puertorriqueña” is a common one within the Puerto Rican literary and theatrical tradition. Juan Gelpi explains how Puerto Rican nationalism has long been connected to an elitist and paternalistic discourse that situates members of society at large as inferior and childlike (12).

The play follows this young married couple, Mario and Luna, as they travel from Puerto Rico to El Paso, Texas when Luna, a university student studying engineering, gets a job at a NASA research laboratory. Mario, who is a writer with a degree in a humanities field, accompanies Luna reluctantly, worrying about leaving behind his father's struggling business and his connection to the island. In El Paso, while Luna is successful at her job and makes friends with a colleague of Cuban descent named Elsa, Mario cannot find work, and soon gets wrapped up with a new friend of Mexican descent, Hugo, who ends up involving Mario in his drug trafficking business. Over the course of the play, tension builds between the couple as Mario increasingly resents Luna's household position—their gender roles have been reversed—and dismissive attitude about returning to Puerto Rico. After a mishap involving a project that Luna has been developing for work, the play ends with Mario deciding to return to the island but leaves Luna's fate uncertain as she rejects both Mario and her work in El Paso. While all of the plays considered in this chapter are indebted in some way to the tradition of migration theater that *La carreta* exemplifies, *Malasangre* is the one that is most explicitly connected to *La carreta* and to its emphasis on the importance of preserving Puerto Rican culture and national identity. Scholars often note the similarities in these two plays, which Rolando J. Romero has situated within the aforementioned Puerto Rican "tradition of moralizing migration" (96).²⁵ Consequently, much of the scholarship written on this topic reinforces a sense of continuity within the tradition of Puerto Rican theater about migration that does not wholly account for the impact that neoliberalism has had on understandings of labor and nation. Although it is true that *Malasangre* demonstrates the ways in which Puerto Rico's continued colonial status in relationship to the United States continues to lead to economic displacement and migrations, the

²⁵ See Perales, Ramos Escobar "Teatro nacional," Romero, and Simpson.

play also attempts to open space for its implied Puerto Rican audience to question the dichotomy between uncritical nationalistic rhetoric and the real or imagined economic advantages available on the mainland. This crisis culminates in Luna's gesture of physically tearing up the blueprints that she, as a laborer in the emerging tech industry, has been working on during most of the play. With this final gesture in mind, I argue that part of *Malasangre*'s project is to stage a rejection of failed political projects with the failed economic opportunities that they claim to offer, opening space instead for the audience to imagine ways of being a laborer in the world that is based neither in the demands of the global economy nor in the exhausted figure of the paternalistic nation.

Situated against a backdrop of sterility and fertility—of no future and no options—on either the island or the mainland, Mario and Luna's plans fail, but this aforementioned final gesture in the play underscores that this failure goes beyond the typical poetic justice of the moralizing migration narrative. In these final moments of dialogue, Mario accepts a future where Puerto Rico maintains its current status quo as he returns to the island. Luna refuses to leave with Mario, effectively rejecting his brand of resignation, but her final actions on stage do not imply that she has decided that her job holds the future she desires either. Before the lights go out, the audience sees Luna do the following:

Luna recoge los planos del sofá. Los abre y los mira con cierto orgullo. Se pasea un poco por la habitación. Una gruesa lágrima viene bajándole. Suavemente lleva las manos hasta el medio del borde del papel y de un tirón los rasga en dos, en cuatro, en seis...y luego los lanza al aire mientras emite un pequeño quejido, un gemido feliz de angustia...Los papeles rotos aún siguen cayendo. (113)

With no accompanying commentary, the audience is asked in this moment to decide what this action of ripping up the plans means for Luna. While she literally destroys and therefore rejects a future that altogether abandons national identity in favor of her new career, and while she has

just rejected Mario's resigned retreat back to the island, Luna's future remains ambiguous. On the one hand, these final actions acknowledge an impasse—an untenable present that leaves no sustainable path forward and under which Luna must adapt and adjust to survive. On the other, this narrative of failed migration metaphorically throws out the script in the end, choosing to dwell in this impasse as a counterhegemonic act that invites audience members to imagine and await with Luna the emergence of economic opportunity on more sustainable terms.

While one interpretation of this ending sees Luna finally deciding that her new life in El Paso was a mistaken choice and that she will follow Mario back to the island, the ambiguity in the stasis of her final moment seems to foreshadow an emphasis on failed and exhausted political and economic projects that has today come to play a major role in both Puerto Rican Studies and cultural theory under neoliberalism in the works of theorists such as Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Sandra Ruiz and Lauren Berlant. As Negrón-Muntaner argues, this can be seen in the island's collective stance in 1998 as they voted “none of the above” in a referendum on Puerto Rico's political status. In contrast to varied interpretations of the vote that circulated at the time, Negrón-Muntaner's interpretation of the 1998 “none of the above” vote sees it, along with other such “none of the above” votes that later occurred around the world, as “a global response to the lack of adequate policies and political imagination” (12).²⁶ Negrón-Muntaner identifies the failed

²⁶ As Negrón-Muntaner explains, this vote was controversial from the beginning because it reframed the typical status referendum options to only include the ones that might be constitutionally viable. Due to the rewording of the descriptions of the various statuses included in the referendum and the exclusion of an “enhanced commonwealth” option, which the Partido Popular Democrático defined as a bilateral pact between two sovereign nations that still guaranteed U.S. citizenship and was generally dismissed as unconstitutional, it was taken as inevitable that the “statehood” option would prevail (2). However, the “none of the above” option won 50.3 percent of the ballots cast and statehood obtained more-or-less the same percentage of votes that it had received in the 1993 referendum (3). According to Negrón-Muntaner: Puerto Rico's pro-statehood governor interpreted the vote not as a rejection of statehood but instead as a protest vote against recent decisions made by his administration; the president of the Partido Popular Democrático claimed it as a definitive rejection of the statehood option; former pro-statehood governor characterized the vote as an exasperating inability to decide; sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel dismissed the idea that the referendum was a good basis for analyzing the politics of political status on the island; and a legal scholar, Christina Duffy Burnett, saw the vote as an implicit endorsement of the colonialism of the current ELA

promises of industrialization, migration to the metropolis and even the nation-building projects around the Caribbean as resulting in the “political burnout” that led to this 1998 referendum (12-13). In other words, for Negrón-Muntaner, “none of the above” represents a new Puerto Rican reality that refuses old ways of approaching politics, seeking instead space for alternative cultural and political paths forward. Sandra Ruiz takes Negrón-Muntaner’s emphasis on sitting with ambiguity a step further by defining Ricanness—as an inflection of Brownness—through endurance and waiting as a “a process of identification deferred or displaced onto the *futural*” (“Waiting” 347). While Negrón-Muntaner hints at this in her work, in Ruiz’s work, waiting is framed as a Puerto Rican way-of-being that endures through the present while remaining oriented toward a future on different terms.²⁷ While taking a larger view of global cultural life since the 1980s, Berlant articulates a complementary concept of impasse where: “...Being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that, at least” (10). Here, Berlant’s goal is to be more generally descriptive of the crisis of the good life under late capitalism, where, as the above quote suggests, subjects persist in their optimistic attachments in spite of the fact that the old mechanisms assuring the good life—from upward mobility to modernized markets—have long since proved their inability to make good on their promises. As previously mentioned, Berlant sees impasse as an ongoing state of crisis that one survives but does not necessarily move past—a characteristic that contradicts the future-oriented perspectives of Negrón-Muntaner’s and Ruiz’s theoretical approaches. However, the

status (3-5). In contrast, Negrón-Muntaner reads the Puerto Rican “none of the above” vote in the context of other similar politicized refusal votes in Israel, Argentina, Russia and Ireland (11-12).

²⁷ Sandra Ruiz’s theorization of Ricanness and Brownness directly engages with José Muñoz’s theorization of queerness as potentiality in *Cruising Utopia* and Brownness as a mode of being together through “feeling together” in articles such as “‘Chico, What does it Feel Like to be a Problem?’ The Transmission of Brownness” and “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*.”

way-of-being described by Berlant resonates with the ambiguity of Negrón-Muntaner's "none-of-the-above" politics and Ruiz's emphasis on endurance and waiting. With Berlant's connection between impasse and the neoliberal moment, the combination of these theoretical perspectives allows me to highlight both how *Malasangre* dwells on the growing impasse of Luna and Mario's situation as Puerto Rican laborers within a global market and how the ending, which offers no solutions, opens up the ambiguous but future-oriented kind of political space emphasized by Negrón-Muntaner and Ruiz. By dwelling in the failure of Luna and Mario's migration journey as a symptom of the larger scale failure and accompanying impasse induced by neoliberalism at a global level, *Malasangre* gestures toward a yet unimagined alternative to the present stasis in which these characters find themselves.

It is clear from the social realism bordering on "panfleto político" characteristics of this play that the current state of island politics is characterized as unsustainable in the generational conflict between Mario and his father, Don Augusto. Throughout the first Act, the dialogue implies that Don Augusto represents a generation that continues to wait for the promises of Muñoz Marín's economic reforms to work out in their favor. For example, Mario's attitude toward his father, whose business associates are stealing from him without him doing anything in response, also reveals another impasse between past and future represented in the emasculation of Don Augusto as Mario exclaims, "¿Por qué tienes que vivir esta maldita vida como si le debieras favores a todo el mundo? Mendigando, rogando que te oigan sin el ceño fruncido, que te den sin molestarse las cosas a las que tienes derecho...Cumplieron contigo regalándote el ideal... 'el pan, la tierra, la libertad' ¡que grande sueño!, pero vacío...(43-44). "Pan, tierra y libertad" was the tagline adopted by Muñoz Marín during his electoral campaigns; it was closely connected to his simultaneous adoption of "jíbaro" identity as an empty political image that

implied solidarity with laborers while disavowing Puerto Rico's political complicity in the oppression of its workers (Vázquez 304-305). In this monologue, Mario criticizes his father's muñocista politics seeing them as corrupt and exploitative and ultimately responsible for the economic crisis on the island.

At the same time, a metaphorical image that comes to dominate Mario's relationship with his family and with the island—the image of Mario's brother left standing on a mine in Vietnam, waiting for it to explode—highlights the impasse of the political and economic situation on the island. Throughout Act I of the play, Mario increasingly mentions his brother, Rubén, even reading onstage some excerpts of letters that Rubén sent from Vietnam. But it is not until tension has grown to a breaking point between Mario and Luna that Mario finally reveals to Luna—and in turn to the audience—the details of Rubén's death, explaining, “Los del Vietcong habían puesto unas bombas que cuando las pisabas, activabas el mecanismo...si levantabas el pie, entonces reventaba. Rubén pisó una de ellas (*Pausa.*) Me contaron sus amigos que se quedó muy quietecito, frío ya; esperando a que explotara...” (86-87). Like the static image of Luna that will end the play, this image of Rubén standing on a bomb, waiting for an explosion, draws a parallel between this violent metaphorical image, Luna's decision at the end of the play, and a long history of colonial exploitation of the labor of Puerto Rican military service members.

The image of Rubén frozen with fear and waiting for the mine underneath him to explode—his own volatile island—points to the deterioration of Puerto Rican narratives that look to the same forms of labor to propel them toward a sustainable future. Taking up José de Diego, a Puerto Rican poet, a prominent island politician at the turn of the 20th century and a celebrated figure of the independentista movement, Juan Flores has analyzed the complicated relationship between U.S. citizenship, labor and military service that has existed since the U.S. acquired

Puerto Rico in 1898. Some years after rejecting a bill that would have limited the load that manual labors could be required to carry and establishing himself in opposition to organized labor on the island, De Diego also expressed his support for a (masculine) citizenship tied to military service and sacrifice, saying: “We are citizens of the United States, we live and twenty thousand of our soldiers will fight and die under its glorious flag... We should wait until Puerto Rican blood brightens the splendor of the flag of the United States, so that our spilled blood enriches our rights and speaks for us to the American people in those jubilant and triumphant days of world peace” (De Diego in Flores 115). This rhetoric that links labor, military service, sacrifice and citizenship persisted in the popular imaginary. Ashley Blake demonstrates this in her study of Puerto Rican gender dynamics during Vietnam as she details the way that claims to both masculinity and the promise of full citizenship were enmeshed with the image of the “good” Puerto Rican soldier (“Soldiers” 310-312). Black also points out how harassment, discrimination, and being forced to do the most dangerous and difficult military work were marked the experiences of soldier belonging to racial minorities, which belied hopes for any claims to citizenship that might be made on the basis of military service (“Soldiers” 317). In this context, the connection between Rubén’s metaphorical “stuckness” and his military service further underscores the lack of viability perceived within the play for existing options for the future of the island.

Before Luna’s final moment onstage, her job in El Paso reaches a similar untenable state as it comes to dominate and determine her whole existence as her time on stage, dialogue, and the domestic space that remains the setting throughout the play are taken over by her job. After entering a design competition at work, Luna quickly learns that her creativity does not belong to her as her colleague Elsa explains that the company will own the rights to the winning design

(60). In addition, the completion and the plans are constantly present onstage from that point on, and Scene 2 of Act 2 begins with the image of Luna sitting at the kitchen table working on her plans as the light come back up (74-75), a position that provides the backdrop of the following scenes in various moments. As Mario and Hugo talk, “*Luna se sienta en su mesa de trabajo, y mal que bien, continúa trabajando en sus planos*” (80), according to the didascalia. As Mario is on the phone with his father, “*Luna sin dejar de oír la conversación, se dirige a sus planos*” (88). And as the light go down on Act 2, “*Luna se mete en sus planos*” (91). This domination of work even in domestic space is a defining characteristic of labor under neoliberalism, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson remind us, “Whether it involves the encroachment of work into the domestic sphere or the more general putting to work of the individual’s capacity for communication and sociality, the propensity of work to colonize more of life is a factor observed by many critics and commentators” (89). Beyond specifically Puerto Rican politics, neoliberalism itself involves its own rearrangement of private space and interpersonal connections in furtherance of totalizing labor productivity.

The impasse in which Mario and Luna find themselves—caught between a lack of options on the mainland and on the island—is further accentuated by the emphasis placed on sterility and fertility throughout the play. Mario’s metaphorical sterility sets the stage before any of the action on stage unfolds. In the first scene, the didascalia explain that the lights come on and slowly reveal Mario, who is passionately playing the saxophone: “*Mario, con un hermoso saxofón dorado entre sus brazos y la boquilla en la boca se encuentra en pleno éxtasis...La luz comienza a domar el cuarto. El viril juego de la música, el vacío electrificante de sus notas...Cualquiera diría que ejecuta un magistral solo de saxofón frente a miles de espectadores*” (20). Moments later, Luna enters, turns off a radio, and the music that is coming

from Mario's saxophone stops. If they have not figured it out before, in this moment, the audience comes to realize that Mario is faking it—he is not producing the music—and the play begins with the gesture of sterile masculinity. Mario's fake saxophone playing is repeated several times throughout the play, consistently reinforcing his association with impotence.

This initial focus on sterility is soon coupled with Luna's lack of fertility. I agree with Rolando J. Romero's emphasis on the way *Malasangre* reproduces the moralization of migration in the body of the woman, which bears reiterating here because it parallels the discourse of non-productive masculinity embodied by Mario. However, while Romero interprets Luna's lack of fertility in terms of the moralizing migration narrative, I am more interested in the way that sterility and fertility provide a symbolic backdrop for the economic options available to Mario and Luna as the plot revolves around their search for work. Much of the dramatic tension of the play rests on Luna's willful infertility as Mario becomes increasingly unwilling to tolerate a home situation where Luna is the principal breadwinner who shows no inclination to take on the traditional role of mother. Romero argues that it accentuates her rejection of the island, arguing, "The rejection of the 'nation' is made through the body of the woman who refuses to have children, who discards a potential fetus in the menstrual blood. Her body will not be used for the preservation of a culture that she holds in contempt for not providing a living wage for the Puerto Ricans" (100). This connection with the blood is evoked both in the title of the work which refers to "malasangre" and to Luna's name. Luna's friend Elsa suggestively explains in one moment, "Debe ser la menopausia o la 'Luna' como decía mi abuelita" (74). The references to Luna's infertility are explicitly mentioned a handful of times in the play as the characters first discuss starting a family—a desire that Luna no longer seems to have after arriving in El Paso. At the peak of their conflict, which occurs at the end of the second act, Mario laments this fact, saying,

“Allá era bueno decir que éramos una familia...Con la gran esperanza de que creciera. ¡Cuánto he querido tener un hijo desde aquellos días, Luna!” (85). While both Mario and Luna are characterized in terms of their lack of fertility—Luna making this choice for herself—Romero notes that it is Luna that is cast in moral terms because her desires have shifted away from appropriately domestic—and, by extension, national—ones (99-100). In this way, he notes how this play fits within the aforementioned larger tradition of narratives that moralize immigration. However, in conjunction with the explicit discourse about the economic and political situation of Puerto Rico, the question of fertility underscores a sense of impasse—a sense of both a lack of future or, in the case of Luna, a rejection of available options for the future.

It is worth noting that inter-Latinx community is also framed as an impossible answer to the fracturing of social relations that occurs throughout the play, as the only relationships with other Latinxs are based in cultural stereotypes and the border itself is presented as “cold,” again calling to mind sterile femininity. In *El Paso*, Mario and Luna are situated between Elsa and Hugo, who are near caricatures of their respective Cuban and Mexican backgrounds and who generally serve to highlight the two extreme negative outcomes of moving to the mainland. Elsa is presented as completely assimilated to U.S. culture. Mario says to Elsa in one moment, “Vamos, gusanita; señálame uno, un solo cubano de Miami o de Nueva York, o de aquí mismo de Texas que no sea proyanqui, que no esté dispuesto a vender hasta la madre por...” (67). Here, Mario places the weight of the full “proyanqui” Cuban stereotype on Elsa. While this is perhaps unsurprising coming from his pro-nationalist character, it is also used in the play to represent a pitfall of Luna’s own attitude about moving, as she makes statements like, “¡Yo no voy a regresar! Está decidido. Me quedo aquí, en Texas. ¿Me escuchaste? Aquí me quedo y te juro por mi santa madre que Puerto Rico se puede ir al mismísimo carajo porque ya no me importa nada

más!” (91). If Elsa’s presence is meant to make visible the threat of assimilation—an abandonment of national identity—Hugo, as a narcotraficante from Mexico, seems to be a constant reminder of the dark side of the neoliberalism that Luna has embraced. In part, he is the voice of globalization and empty multiculturalism, as he declares to Mario, “¡Chin, mano! Ya hay generaciones de mexicanos casados con gringos, gringos con cubanos, argentinos, dominicanos...No me vengas con la guasa de que unos son diferentes. A este país ya se le acabaron las fronteras” (69). This oversimplified view of borderless nations turns menacing as he begins to provide Mario with cocaine, involve him in his business and even comes close to raping Luna when Mario briefly leaves them alone together. On the one hand, perhaps Hugo’s character highlights the violence of neoliberal capitalism, of which, as Andrés Guzmán reminds us “narco violence is the most naked expression of its reason” (112). On the other, Elsa and Hugo point toward a perceived impossibility of community in both the literal and metaphorical border region. Unlike the image of New York that will emerge in the next play under analysis, *El Paso*, a border town that the didascalia associates with “frío asesino” and “un viento de cuchilla” (58), seems to hold no promise in terms of a new forms of Latinx collectivities that give hope for a future that makes national identities obsolete.

Throughout the play, all of these elements combine and culminate in the final image of Luna standing immobile onstage with the pieces of her plans fluttering down around her. Or in Berlant’s terms, Mario and Luna find themselves at an impasse as the “old mechanism assuring the good life” (10)—here staged as the promises of both island politics and migrant labor in the mainland under neoliberalism—fail. In the face of these failures, and that of her own failed migration, Luna’s stance offers no clear path forward but embodies the productive impasse of “none-of-the-above,” which is itself laden with a yet unimagined futurity.

Potential Inter-Caribbean Diasporic Coalitions in *Indocumentados: El otro merengue*

Unlike *Malasangre*, a Puerto Rican play that focuses on Puerto Rican protagonists, *Indocumentados* directly engages with the encounter between Latinx enclaves in New York by foregrounding a Dominican protagonist, Gregorio Santos, whose development as a character in the play draws the limitations of Caribbean nationalisms, anti-blackness, and immigrant labor conditions of a late-1980s New York into tragic relief. It was first staged by Puerto Rican playwright José Luis Ramos Escobar's theater group, Teatro del Sesenta in 1989 before another staging at a theater festival in New York in 1990. Having participated in a variety of Puerto Rican theater collectives, such as Anamú, Moriviví and el colectivo Nacional de Teatro during the sixties and seventies, Ramos Escobar was a long-active actor, director, and playwright by the premiere of *Indocumentados* (Irizarry 107-108). As aforementioned, like other playwrights of his generation in Puerto Rico, he is known for the political and ideological content of his work, but, as Guillermo Irizarry indicates, his work avoids falling into the "panfleto politico" due to the creative complexity of his approach (108).

While scholarship about *Indocumentados* has done a good job of accounting for the way that the play draws into relief the question of the continued relevance of nationalism based on racialized notions of inclusion and exclusion, less attention has been paid to the play's situation within the reifying neoliberal context of the 1980s. The protagonist of the play, Gregorio, is an undocumented immigrant that cannot find work, so a friend helps him purchase the papers of a young Puerto Rican named Luis that has already passed away. In order to live as Luis, Gregorio must abandon his Dominican culture and fully transform into a Puerto Rican. While he succeeds in this transformation in full view of the audience by adopting a Puerto Rican accent and cultural customs, moving to a Puerto Rican neighborhood and frequenting Puerto Rican establishments,

by the end of the play he can no longer handle the psychological pressure of denying his own identity. He decides to return to the Dominican Republic, but he has no money to do so, so he attempts to rob a convenience store and is shot by the police in the process—a repetition of Luis’ fate before Gregorio adopted his documents. *Indocumentados* places the Dominican Gregorio at the center of a *La carreta*-esque moral dilemma about whether migration to New York can only lead to the protagonist’s moral and physical destruction, even evoking a shadow figure named “Luis” that appears on the stage, which evokes not only the name of the Puerto Rican identity that Gregorio has purchased but also the name of the eldest son that dies at the end of *La carreta*. Although Gregorio’s onstage transformation into Luis draws into relief the constructed nature of both national and racial identities, it also highlights the embodied transformations required of migrant laborers under neoliberalism. Moreover, as a Puerto Rican play about an undocumented Dominican immigrant in New York, it draws attention to the growing and arbitrary importance of documentation as a factor in this transformation. In contrast with *Malasangre*, which leaves the audience with a final moment of impasse by affectively evoking it in Luna’s final scene, *Indocumentados* draws the audience into a similar situation of impasse but does so at a structural level. On the one hand, as Gregorio dies onstage in a clear repetition of the previous death of the Luis whose identity he has adopted—which is emphasized for the audience as the ever-present shadow of Luis, who “*se escurre por el escenario y se acuesta junto a Gregorio*” (102)—the audience is seemingly left with the impasse and hopelessness of a cycle of discrimination, poverty and death for members of both the Dominican and Puerto Rican diasporas in New York. This is further highlighted throughout the play through the supplementation of social realism with metadramatic theater techniques to a Brechtian effect. For example, in social realist fashion, the dialogue between characters highlights true-to-life struggles related to being an

undocumented immigrant in search of work, the impact of recent developments in immigration policy in the United States, and the quotidian aspects of the factory job that Gregorio obtains after taking on Luis' identity. These social realist aspects of the play are overlaid and interrupted with techniques that lead to a distancing effect that breaks the fourth wall in a way that traditional social realist theater does not—for example, Gregorio's character-within-a-character adoption of Luis' identity and the use of music to signal scene transitions.²⁸ With this in mind, I argue that by supplementing social realism with metadramatic theater techniques and placing emphasis on the embodied nature of national, racial and laborer identities, the play questions the inevitability of the plays ending, imagining the possibility of an inter-Caribbean diasporic coalition that might counteract the consuming logic of neoliberalism.

Karma Chávez's thinking about coalition has been especially informative to my own use of the term here. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's theorization of utopian potentialities but placing more emphasis on the potentiality of the present moment, Chávez defines a "coalitional moment" as occurring when "political issues coincide or merge in the public sphere in ways that create space to reenvision and potentially reconstruct rhetorical imaginaries" (7).²⁹ Chávez sees moments of coalition between disparate political interests or groups as always precarious but "not necessarily temporary" (8), emphasizing the constant commitment required in order for such coalitions to persist. I argue that *Indocumentados* seeks to underscore both the urgent need for and the potential of this kind of commitment to coalition.

²⁸ For an in-depth analysis of the use of metadrama in the play and its connection to the constructedness of national identity, see Guillermo B. Irizarry's article "Metadrama y subjetividad en tres obras de José Luis Ramos Escobar."

²⁹ For Muñoz, "the here and now is a prison house" ("Cruising" 1). The new forms of the social that he imagines through queerness are most often encountered in the aesthetic realm and are also often more easily found by looking toward the past at "moments, objects, and spaces" that "offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness" ("Cruising" 22). In a present that has failed and is failing to imagine the social outside of current hegemonic structures of power and sociality, Muñoz emphasizes the hope of looking to the past and the future for imagining the world anew.

In its dwelling on the theme of inter-Caribbean cultural relationships, *Indocumentados* finds itself situated within a larger literary context in the archipelago and in New York as it both evokes the metaphor of the “same boat” and rethinks the Nuyorican tradition, drawing Dominicans into the diasporic Puerto Rican cultural sphere. One thinks of, for example, Ana Lydia Vega’s short story, “Encancaranublado,” in which three symbolic characters—one Dominican, one Cuban and one Haitian—share a rickety boat that is rescued by an American ship, where they are put under the care of a Puerto Rican sailor who advises them, “Aquí si quieren comer tienen que meter mano y duro. Estos gringos no le dan na gratis ni a su mai” (20). Like in *Indocumentados*, Puerto Ricans’ close historic relationship with the United States becomes a warning to be heeded for all Caribbean migrants looking for economic opportunity and a realization that national differences mean nothing when all of these groups encounter the metropolis. Mayra Santos Febres’ collection of poetry, *Boat People*, includes poems that metaphorically intertwine themes of undocumentedness, the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the contemporary Caribbean condition dominated by what Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel refers to as cultures of “migración y desplazamiento” (*Caribe* 30) and what Silvio Torres-Saillant has called “homo migrans” (228). At the same time, the cyclical nature of death in the *Indocumentados* evokes Pedro Pietri’s “Puerto Rican Obituary” where “Juan / Miguel / Milagros / Olga / Manuel / All died yesterday today / and will die again tomorrow...” (1358). In the play, the social and economic difficulties of the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York that continued to be highlighted in Nuyorican poetry long after Pietri began to perform and publish his work is asked to find common ground with the similar experiences of new Dominican migrants to the city so that both Luis and Gregorio might hope to break this cycle. In this way, while one reading of *Indocumentados* might see it more firmly situated within a tradition of

moralizing migration narratives where Gregorio's death is poetic justice for his abandonment of his national identity, its embodiment of the Puerto Rican and Dominican relationship resonates beyond this interpretation and toward the importance of inter-Caribbean solidarity.

On a metaphorical level, this transformation of Gregorio into Luis puts one in mind of the economic relationship within the manufacturing sector—which is featured in *Indocumentados*—that emerged between Puerto Ricans and Dominican immigrants to the mainland in the 1980s which made this particular inter-Caribbean relationship difficult. It is generally acknowledged that by 1980 Dominicans had established their own community in Washington Heights and that there was an uptick in Dominican migration during this decade that was accompanied by a downturn in available manufacturing jobs that had previously provided migrants from Puerto Rico with jobs. In their study, Ramón Grosfoguel and Chloé Georas trace the way that Puerto Ricans' successful campaigns and struggles for increased labor rights priced them out of a shrinking manufacturing sector that increasingly favored immigrant labor—both authorized and unauthorized—in order to keep costs down (108). As noncitizens and a less expensive source of labor, Dominicans effectively replaced Puerto Ricans as they arrived in New York City (Grosfoguel and Georas 110). Dominicans arrived in increasing numbers in the 1980s due to the collapse of the sugar industry on the island and the resulting spike in unemployment (Aparicio 59). Grosfoguel and Georas also note a similar trend with Dominican migrants during this time as other Latinx and Asian immigrant groups priced them out of the manufacturing sector to a certain extent (110). However, Ramona Hernández notes that although Dominican participation in the manufacturing industry “dramatically declined from 48.6 percent in 1980 to 25.7 percent in 1990,” the sector remained the second largest employer of Dominicans as the nineties began (“Mobility” 175-176). Hernández draws on Saskia Sassen's concept of the “downgraded

manufacturing sector” (Sassen 23) to emphasize the way that sweatshops and other informal kinds of labor practices increasingly came to replace the unionized, and therefore more expensive, industry (“Dominicans” 189). In this way, racialized national animosities are heightened on the mainland by the neoliberal economy’s search for ever cheaper labor.

As indicated above, many scholars writing about *Indocumentados* have written in depth about the way the play highlights the constructedness of these racialized national identities. For Guillermo B. Irizarry, it is Ramos Escobar’s dependence on metadrama that best calls attention to the performative nature of nation. Irizarry argues, “*Indocumentados* problematiza la identidad nacional como una contrucción cuya materialidad existe en los documentos (licencia de conducir, certificado de nacimiento, tarjeta de seguro social) y en un performance cultural (el sociolecto, los chistes, el refranero, los habitus en general)” (120). In other words, by breaking down national identity into these individual components which the actor then performs on stage—while the audience, in Brechtian style, is fully aware of this performance—underscores the parallel way in which these aspects of national identity are equally as performed in everyday life. The scene in which Gregorio purchases documents and transforms himself into the Puerto Rican, Luis, in order to find work, is one of the best examples of the use of metadrama in the play. Here, Gregorio rehearses his new identity with the help of Ampliado, the older Dominican man that has helped him arrange his purchase:

AMPLIADO: Tengo entendido que su música preferida es el merengue.

GREGORIO: El merengue es de lo platanitos dominicanos. Lo nuestro es salsa: Willie Colón, Gran Combo, Héctor Lavoe.

AMPLIADO: Ven, vamos a darnos un par de cervezas Presidentes.

GREGORIO: Eso no es cerveza, eso es agua de piringa. Consígueme una Budweiser, Coors, algo, tú sabes...

AMPLIADO: Oiga, Luis ¿Y porque ustedes tienen dos banderas? ¿Son gringos o qué?

GREGORIO: Somos ciudadanos americanos, y a orgullo. Entramos aquí como Pedro por su casa, conseguimos empleos, recibimos “welfare” y seguro social, cosas que ustedes no pueden alcanzar a pesar de tener una sola bandera. (59)

In this moment, one can see how Gregorio depends on a derogatory position toward Dominican culture—their popular beer, Presidente, and their choice of music—to prove his authenticity as Puerto Rican. As this scene continues over several pages of the text, which would translate into several minutes in a staged version of the play, it draws the audience into an awareness of the everyday performance of national identity.

Furthermore, both Irizarry and other scholars such as Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Rita De Maeseneer, and Christina Baker recognize the way that part of this cultural performance depends on the oppositional framing of other cultural identities. Baker notes the racialized aspect of the metadramatic characteristics of the play by highlighting their similarities with strategies of passing and their accompanying “banderas sonoras” that shift between Dominican merengue and Puerto Rican salsa (484). Drawing on the work of Etienne Balibar, Martínez-San Miguel argues that Caribbean nationalisms could not exist without a corresponding racism that affirms lines of inclusion and exclusion, which is often expressed through racist jokes (“Caribe” 166, “De ilegales” 166). Martínez-San Miguel also proposes, “Compartir el prejuicio anti-dominicano, ampliar el repertorio y reconocer el ritual exclusive del chiste comprueba la pertenencia a la comunidad étnica puertorriqueña, independientemente del domicilio o territorio en el que habite un individuo” (“Caribe” 157). In this way, whether on the island or in an enclave in a different country, national boundaries are maintained through cultural practices, like joking, that establish clear lines between “us” and “them.” As Martínez-San Miguel also notes, *Indocumentados* uses this well-known joke tradition to reveal prejudices that arbitrarily separate Puerto Ricans from Dominicans. Gregorio has no trouble looking Puerto Rican; it is cultural performances such as joking that establish boundaries between two phenotypically similar nations. In the following bar scene, Gregorio is called upon to participate in this kind of performance:

OBRERO 1: Oye, Luis, y ¿tú no sabes ningún chiste de dominicanos?

GREGORIO: ¿Yo?

OBRERO 1: Seguro, man, échate uno bien bragao.

OBRERO 2: Olvídate, que aquí no hay ningún dominicano.

OBRERO 3: ¿Qué pasa? ¿No te atreves?

GREGORIO: ¿Cómo?...¿A qué voy a tener miedo? (82)

With the number of men goading Gregorio to make a joke, which the audience knows is at his own expense, the scene is able to evoke both the extent of the social pressure associated with these kinds of social performances and their lack of basis in any material difference that exists beyond the constructed nature of national identities.

However, a shift in focus to the labor issues at the center of the plot and the way they are enacted on Gregorio's body throughout the play complements these previous analyses by drawing the audience's attention to what is at stake for all Caribbean migrant workers within a neoliberal economy while also positioning the body at the center of resistance to economic pressures. The question of labor is introduced from the first scene as Ampliado and his wife María argue about how much help Ampliado should be giving Gregorio in his job search:

MARIA: Eh, Ampliado, hay montones, montones de ilegales que no son ciudadanos y que trabajan.

AMPLIADO: Sí, trabajos de una semana, de un día, de un susto.

MARIA: Ellos sabían el riesgo cuando se vinieron para acá. (25)

This brief exchange highlights the possibility of intra-diasporic—rather than just inter-diasporic—conflicts over economic opportunity and mutual responsibility while also drawing attention to the increasing precarity of the New York labor market, here identified with temporariness, “riesgo” and “susto.” Although his employment opportunities improve once he has adopted a Puerto Rican identity, the assembly-line work that he finds is characterized by the way that it transforms his body, paralleling the previous scenes marking the equally taxing labor of becoming Luis: “*El trabajo continua su rutina de la construcción de ventanas. Las luces*

indican el paso del tiempo. Gregorio ensimismado en su aprendizaje va incorporándose al proceso, al principio con obvios tropiezos, luego con destreza creciente, hasta que logra dominarlo. Sin embargo el ritmo de producción lo agobia. El cansancio se apodera de él” (69).

The audience watches his laboring body as it stumbles through the motions, begins to move with ease and finally becomes weighed down and wearied by the process. While this process, along with the aforementioned ones that mark his transformation into Luis, highlight his vulnerability to cultural and market forces at a bodily level, they contradictorily underscore his able-bodied dexterity at mastering these transformations on the stage. As a result, as the constructedness of racial, national and laborer comes into view for the audience, the possibility of deconstructing these identities and “acting” differently is also evoked.

What is clear over the course of the play is that, in neoliberal times, citizenship status as the vehicle for easier and more efficient inclusion in the labor market is not the solution that will resolve economic disparities and provide better opportunities. In the final scene that takes place in the factory setting, where Gregorio is finding it difficult to cope with hiding his Dominican identity and has begun showing up to work late and intoxicated, Brocco, the Italian boss of the factory fires him, declaring in his characteristic mix of Italian, Spanish and English, “All of you portoricans [sic] are the same. Too much talk, no action...Certamente. Tu sei lazy, like all portoricans [sic]...Ascolta, I don’t give a damn about any of you...Tu non fai il lavoro, tu sei niente” (89). This scene simultaneously highlights Gregorio’s struggle with the repression of his own cultural identity and the fate of the migrant worker under neoliberalism where belonging is measured in terms of productivity rather than official citizenship status. In this moment, Brocco’s comments both unwittingly lumps Puerto Rican and Dominican workers together and uses an accusation of laziness and a lack of work ethic as a slur. In the wake of the immigrant

rights marches in 2006—long after the decade that provides the context for *Indocumentados*—scholars have paid increasing attention to the somewhat problematic mode of citizenship claimed by undocumented workers that participate in this kind of activism. Beth Baker-Cristales draws attention to the way that both the media and marchers themselves invoked a neoliberal discourse of citizenship by characterizing undocumented workers solely as “hard-working, peaceful, clean, self-possessed, law-abiding and well-behaved” (69). Shannon Gleeson similarly refers to this framing of the marches as “market citizenship,” which she defines as “identifying the worth of a citizen as either self-supporting, disciplined, or engaged in private enterprise” (404). Both Gleeson and Cristina Beltrán emphasize how linking citizenship with the demands of the market strengthens and reifies existing institutions rather than calling attention to their limitations and weaknesses (412; 131). While *Indocumentados* is not a play about an undocumented immigrant seeking to make a political claim based in that status, this body of scholarship helps to illuminate the way that a central agenda of neoliberalism is inextricably linking migrant labor power to claims of citizenship and belonging. And if, as Karen Shimakawa suggests, “the (undocumented) immigrant laborer is, perhaps, the neoliberal figure par excellence” (100), neither documented nor undocumented migrants and members of the Caribbean diasporas can escape from this logic based on differentially privileged national identities.

Even as the audience begins to see not only the constructed nature of essentialized nationalisms but also the force with which neoliberalism enacts itself on the body of the laborer, Gregorio’s tragic flaw is that he cannot see them, which causes him to miss potential coalitional moments that open up throughout the play. In the beginning, his need for a new identity is a direct response to his material reality. He cannot get a job because of the anti-Dominican prejudices he encounters, and he needs a way to survive. And although his wife reminds him that

when they arrived in New York, no one was there to help them, Ampliado is committed to a more convivial way of interacting with new immigrants like Gregorio, saying to his wife, “María, este apartamento es como un pedacito de Quisqueya aquí en esta ciudad. Si cerramos nuestras puertas dejaríamos de ser nosotros” (25). Here, Ampliado frames Dominican identity not in terms exclusions but instead in terms of open doors.³⁰ Throughout the play, both Ampliado and Toña, Gregorio’s Puerto Rican girlfriend (who knows him as Luis), warn Gregorio to avoid falling into essentializing nationalisms. When Gregorio, as Luis, begins spouting muñocista nationalist rhetoric, Ampliado cautions him, “Gregorio, ten cuidado, que se está yendo la mano” (60). During the joke scene, Toña, who works at the bar, repeats also admonishes Gregorio not to fall into exclusionary patterns, saying, “...Además, yo no sé porque ustedes le tienen tanta mania a los dominicanos, si total, somos dos ramas del mismo árbol” (74). The foreshadowing impact of these warnings does not dissuade Gregorio from falling into the trap of nationalisms as he loses his job and concludes that the only answer is to return to the Dominican Republic. He proclaims to Ampliado, “No se preocupe, compadre, que por fin lo comprendí. Nosotros somos otra cosa y tenemos que dar la batalla allá en nuestro país” (101). I agree with Laurietz Seda that in the context of the play, it is the fact that Gregorio does not understand that ultimately leads to his death in the last scene. Seda argues, “Pero tampoco puede insertarse dentro de las ideas posmodernas y de globalización que abogan por la formulación de identidades híbridas porque no cree en ellas. Gregorio asume la concepción de las identidades homogéneas y se ancla en los mitos de pertenencia a la tierra para encontrar cierta seguridad” (Seda 129). This misrecognition

³⁰ While this generous attitude is an important part of Ampliado’s characterization throughout the play, providing a contrast for Gregorio’s increasingly hostile and essentialized perspective, it is important to note that Ampliado is not cast in terms of absolute virtue, as he demonstrates generosity toward Dominicans and Puerto Ricans but not toward Haitians, remarking, “No se trata de dejar a nadie en cuero, sino de compartir, y más entre hermanos. Lo de los haitianos es otra vaina. Son nuestros enemigos, siempre lo han sido” (27).

of the situation leads to the cyclical impasse of the ending. Falling back on conceptualizations of belonging that are rooted in national origin, Gregorio fails to recognize the potential of the kind of community evoked by Ampliado's and Toña's words and actions.

Similar to what happened to Mario and Luna in *Malasangre*, the promises of a better future have failed Gregorio as both life in New York and a return to the Dominican Republic are framed as at an untenable impasse. But in *Indocumentados*, the audience's attention is drawn to what Gregorio does not see. Through its focus on embodiment due to the play's emphasis on metadramatic techniques, the inevitability of Gregorio's fate—as a representation of the fates of many Puerto Rican and Dominican migrants who came before him—is questioned as the play highlights the fragile potential of inter-Caribbean diasporic coalitions that could break this cycle. While *Indocumentados* provides no clarity about what practical goals might be met through these acts of coalition—through this recognition of being “in the same boat”—it contrasts the potential of these relationships with the givenness of the fate of nation-based identities under the increasing stakes of a neoliberal market.

Labor and Feminine Solidarity in Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-Work*

As a play that was written and produced in the Dominican Republic about the topic of Dominican immigration to the United States, the final play that I will look at as part of my current analysis takes up the theme of documentation that is highlighted in *Indocumentados* but returns to a binary transnational context. Taking up the issue of gender dynamics in a transnational distribution of labor, *Por hora y a Piece-Work* is a simultaneous denouncement of the precarity of immigrant labor conditions and a tentative gesture toward the possibility of feminine solidarity outside of a patriarchal authoritarian structure. This one-act play was written by Dominican playwright Elizabeth Ovalle in the wake of her three-year stay in New York in the

early 1990s, during which time she hoped to continue her training as an actor. While she found herself forced to abandon her studies, her time working in the city at supermarkets and factories provided material for her theatrical work (Quackenbush, Stevens). In fact, during the same year that she returned to the Dominican Republic, *Por hora y a Piece-Work* was awarded first place and performed as part of a 1993 contest at the Casa de Teatro in Santo Domingo.

The play, displaying many characteristics of social realism, follows a recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Juana, who arrives at a sweat shop looking for work as a seamstress. Juana finds a job and also finds herself at the center of a stereotypical immigration scenario. As an undocumented immigrant, she must work an unreasonable number of hours for little pay and under the constant threat of having her wages cut down to per “piece-work” rather than an hourly wage. She explains her dreams of saving up to bring her daughters to New York, saying, “Aquí desde que lleguen las pongo a la escuela, hasta inglés aprender. Además, con lo que gane puedo pagar una habitación para las tres y hartarla toda la comida buena que hay aquí y más adelante...Podemos alquilar un apartamento.” (258). Although she begins to develop a friendship with another woman named Aída, her time in the factory is dominated by conflicts with other women over everything from class differences to men, inappropriate sexual advances from her boss, and fear of her immediate surroundings and of being caught without papers. In the end, both her daughters and immigration officials arrive, which functions, as Camilla Stevens notes, as the abrupt *deus ex machina* that leads to her return her to the Dominican Republic. While much shorter and lacking the complexity of both the plays considered above, the scenario presented in *Por hora* is a clear homage to the moralization of the immigrant journey as seen in Marqués’ *La carreta* and provides a useful Dominican comparison to these Puerto Rican examples. While situated within a different context, *Por hora* navigates similar issues with a

rapidly expanding transnational economy as well as a patriarchal national point of departure. Caught in the tension between these two untenable ways of framing the place of the laborer in the neoliberal world, Juana, like the characters from both *Malasangre* and *Indocumentados*, seeks a space for a different kind of relation—namely one of feminine solidarity. Although Juana’s imagined journey of return evokes images reminiscent of the idealized jíbaro scene of *La carreta* as she emphasizes a return to the land as the answer to her trouble in the United States, the repeated interest throughout the short play in the question of feminine solidarity demonstrates a turn not toward unquestioning nationalism but toward the imagining of a nation where different kinds of social ties—aside from traditional heteropatriarchal ones—might better facilitate social life within an increasingly hostile transnational setting.

From the beginning of *Por Hora*, the structure of the set emphasizes the dehumanizing and socially fracturing nature of factory life that exerts almost absolute control on the actions of the actors on the stage. While Juana is the main protagonist of the play who initiates the dialogue on stage, the factory setting itself dominates the stage and the action of the play from the beginning in true social realist fashion. The rigidly structured factory atmosphere is thoroughly established both spatially and sonically. If, as Begley argues, the “peculiar materialism” inherent in realistic drama is visible in a “display of objects” that, “seemingly outside of ideology,” “serve as ideological guarantors” (339), the elaborate factory setting described by Ovalle works to guarantee the social and economic situation of the workers onstage. As the initial stage directions describe, “No deberá tener escenografía alguna, sólo el mobiliario necesario que requiere una factoría” (246). The stage is transformed into the factory itself as it is filled with a conglomeration of objects that take over, evoking this space:

“Todo se desarrolla en una factoría de Nueva York, un escenario largo, amplio, debe usarse de foro para colocar los percheros para colgar las ropas ya hechas, delante están

las máquinas y en el medio las prensas y planchas. En un lateral deberá estar el piso como se le llama al sitio de colocar la ropa para limpiar o deshilar, en el otro lateral un reloj ponchador con todas las tarjetas de empleados” (246).

In addition to this imposing set design, the large number of characters who are either listed as members of the cast or mentioned in passing in the didascalia further contributes to this sense that even the humans on stage are part of this elaborate machinery. The sounds that accompany this material design also strengthen this potentially overpowering sensation, strictly regulating the entrances and exits of the factory worker characters. While the play is presented in one act, its action is divided by two “apagones” that are marked by the sound of the siren that announces the beginning and end of the day, and break times. This highly ritualized and controlled action of entering and exiting is marked repetitively in the didascalia. For example, after the first curtain drops, “*suena la sirena de entrada, van llegando, colocan sus abrigos en el perchero, van hablando, y los que cobran por hora pasan por el ponchador de tarjeta*” (252). After the day of work, “*suena la sirena de salida todos los que tienen que ponchar tarjetas lo hacen y salen*” (257). Before lunch break “*suena la sirena*” (254), and when it is time to return to work “*suena la sirena*” (255). In this way, the dramatic space both mirrors the regulated nature of a border crossing and overdetermines the movements and actions of the characters on the stage, molding them and transforming them rather than being transformed by them.

In relational terms, the silence imposed on the women in repeated moments throughout the work emphasizes a violent, patriarchal structure that precludes all forms of solidarity among the factory workers. In one moment, for example, Freddy, one of the male employees, threatens one of the female employees, Capitaleña, who has insulted him:

CAPITALEÑA: Mira asqueroso, ¡ponte tú de hablador! Lambón mira conmigo no te metas, no me coja en tu lengua y mejor será que no me dirijas la palabra para no lavarte en sangre. ¡Tú no me conoces!

FREDDY: (*La coge por el cuello, la pega en la pared, como un animal. Saca un cuchillo.*) Mira mujercita de cabaret, la próxima vez te cuida la lengua. (251)

While both Capitaleña and Freddy speak in violent terms, it seems clear from this scene that Freddy is the one that actually has the power and propensity to follow through on the threat. This kind of violent and dominant masculinity is perhaps no clearer than in the relationship between the factory manager, Señor Recio, and the women. In addition to attempting to sexually assault Juana, Sr. Recio repeatedly silences the women with his presence, making comments such as, “Cállase que aquí el único que tiene derecho a hablar soy yo...” (256). Throughout the play, the men make it clear that they are in control both literally and at a structural level within the space. It is also clear that this creates a conflictive space for the female workers as they interact with each other. One of the most revealing examples of this kind of conflict is in the following exchange between Capitaleña and Juana:

CAPITALEÑA: (A Juana.) La verdad jevita que usted es puerca un rato (Juana se la queda mirando de mala manera) hazme el favor de no usar mi vaso, ni mucho menos me lo deje sucio, ah y otra cosa, cuando vaya al baño dele a la palanquita que a veces va gente detrás suyo. Puerca. Como en tu campo lo que hay es letrina, por eso no sabe la pobre que hay una palanquita. (Se ríe; otros también.)

JUANA: (La agarra por los cabellos.) Mira “azorá” yo seré campesina, pero si tengo que sacarte la lengua, te la saco por chismosa, yo no estoy buscando chisme yo...

...

CAPITALEÑA: Ah, mira, y no me mire mi novio que te atrapé clavándole los ojos, mojá.

While this conflict is framed in terms of class—Capitaleña as higher class and urban compared to Juana’s lower class and rural background—Capitaleña’s comment that it hinges on Juana as a threat to Capitaleña’s security due to the fact that she has a boyfriend. In a space so dominated and determined by a patriarchal power structure, hope for the formation of any kind of collective is made to seem like an impossibility throughout the play.

On the one hand, these two aspects of the play underscore a highly gendered experience of being a laborer within a global marketplace ever in search of cheaper labor and which is exacerbated for those lacking documentation. As part of the manufacturing sector, garment workers were hard hit by the loss of over 400,000 manufacturing jobs in New York between 1969 and 1985 (Hernández, “Dominican” 175-176). However, New York remained the principal destination of Dominican immigration during these decades and, even as jobs relocated outside of the city, the sector continued to be a main employer of Dominican workers. In spite of its dramatic decline, manufacturing still employed one out of two Dominican workers in 1980 and was still the second largest employer of Dominicans by 1990 (Hernández, “Dominican” 176). Taking up Saskia Sassen’s term in her study of Dominicans in the garment industry, Ramona Hernández emphasizes the growing precarity of the sector when she explains:

The “downgraded” manufacturing sector, associated with sweatshops and informal labor practices, means more than just the development of an industrial sector made up of small and less mechanized shops that came to replace an expensive and highly unionized type of industrial setting. It also means that workers who operate in these kinds of infrastructures often live below the poverty level, and that such conditions remain even when more workers are added in a given household. (Hernández, “Dominican” 189)³¹

This shift and “downgrading” were also due in large part to new waves of migrant laborers arriving from Asia and Latin America in the wake of the Immigration Act of 1965, which provided a more flexible labor force and drove wages down (Palpacuer 55). It had a greater impact on Dominican women who, by 1990, headed almost one out of two Dominican households in the United States and where fifty percent of these households did not exceed the poverty line with full-time employment (Hernández, “Mobility” 101). As Patricia R. Pessar

³¹ In her 1988 book *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, Saskia Sassen coins the phrase “downgraded manufacturing sector” to account for the conditions that Ramona Hernández describes in relation to Dominican garment workers.

emphasizes, even immigrant-owned contracting firms employed a female majority that were preferred because they were “low-wage, compliant, immigrant workers” (132). And although Dominican immigrants displaced other ethnic groups, such as Puerto Ricans, in the garment industry do to their lack of organizing infrastructure and accompanying willingness to work for lower wages, it bears emphasizing that undocumented status intensified the vulnerability of some Dominican women, who tended to work in more informal situations for lower, under-the-table wages (Whalen 59). It is this shifting and exploitative historical and economic context that the play highlights in Juana’s acceptance of work in spite of the conditions that she encounters and in the ways that her onstage environment continually demands her compliance, silence and docility.

On the other hand, this play offers more than a clichéd and moralizing warning to those that might be considering the journey to the United States as it throws into relief the patriarchal and gendered dynamics of the staged garment factory as a displaced microcosm of Dominican society. While, as Camilla Stevens points out, the men in the play are mostly blatant stereotypes of immigrants that could sometimes even be met with laughter by a Dominican audience (35),³² the repeated examples of violence against women and the control that Señor Recio in particular exerts over the voices of the women in the factory also resonates with a Dominican context where gendered violence is a part of everyday life. In a 2014 report published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic was named as the country in the region with the third highest rate of femicide committed by an intimate or former partner. This study confirms in quantitative terms the trend of gendered violence that Denise Paiewonsky describes in her 2004 essay, saying, “Un ultimo factor a tomar en cuenta en relación

³² Stevens points to the social climbing boss, the drug dealer, the “cadenú” youth and the effeminately gay lottery-seller (35).

a las realidades de la familia dominicana es el problema de la violencia intrafamiliar que, aunque nunca ha sido cuantificada con precisión, se reconoce como un fenómeno de grandes dimensiones y tendencia creciente, que afecta tanto a las mujeres como a los menores” (337). This dynamic is further elaborated by Maja Horn in terms of Dominican politics and power structures. Horn summarizes the impact of the gendered structuring of Dominican society as she looks at “the particular forms of political expediency that gender discourses have in the Dominican Republic, where having power and being powerless, domination and subordination, and being a leader or a follower are often phrased in gendered terms and through notions of virility” (12-13). Jenny K. Rodriguez has explored the way that this kind of gendered aggression structures the Dominican public sector, finding that “when women participate in interactions initiated by men, they assume a passive role whereas men always assume an active role, whether or not they initiate the interaction” (54). Moreover, she finds that women’s relationships with each other are affected by this environment as they result to “criticizing/backstabbing each other based on the belief that they struggle with one another to be accepted by men, hence a feeling of competitiveness for male approval” (64). While these behaviors might not seem extraordinary because they can be common traits of male-dominant environments, coupled with the high rate of gendered violence, these workplace behaviors contribute to a view of Dominican society where masculinity is equated with social and political power. In this way, normative Dominican social and political imaginaries that depend on patriarchal formulations of belonging and that also structure women’s experience as a part of the workforce are highlighted by the gendered dynamics in the play.

With these dynamics as a backdrop, Juana’s transformation partway through the play takes on both economic and feminist significance in a way that sees these two issues as

necessarily intertwined. Although the main character's sudden metamorphosis from a meek and fearful immigrant worker that is desperate for a job into a self-aware and vocal advocate for the rights of the women in the factory is underdeveloped in terms of plot and dramatic structure, the sudden shift in the play's plot comes across as a thought experiment in which Ovalle ponders the possibility of this more agential posture. Juana addresses the women around her, attempting to animate them to take a stand against the unfair treatment at the hands of their boss, Sr. Recio. She declares, "Usted sabe una cosa, yo no sirvo para aguantarle mucha mierda a nadie, a nadie, ¿qué es lo que se cree? ...Verdad, Aída, que mucho hacemos nosotros, oye como te tiró esa caja casi entre los pies, qué animal, pero digan algo no se queden callado..." (257). As Sr. Recio enters the scene, catching Juana in the middle of her speech, the other women respond with their silence and by punching out and exiting the stage. This scene serves as culmination of the women's previous bickering and leads Camilla Stevens to observe, "Through the workers' daily conversations, we intuit that the burden of survival erodes most efforts at building camaraderie" ("Home" 35). While Stevens reads this characteristic of the play, among others, in service of creating a social realistic image of Dominican attitudes toward migration, I am more interested here in understanding how this aspect of the play highlights the absence of female solidarity within this space. With this moment as the moment that initiates climax of the action of the play, followed by a shift toward a growing desire to return to the island, this staged inability to establish and maintain friendships of strategic organizing value is inextricable from the denunciations of the economically exploitative situation in which she finds herself.

This emphasis in the play particularly stands out within a Dominican history of feminism that has often been contradictorily incorporated into the patriarchal social structure under the leadership of authoritarian figures such as Rafael Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer. Scholars

researching Dominican feminism have long found it necessary to contend with the significance of Trujillo's use of early versions of women's movement in the nation to bolster both his paternal image and his projection of a democratic image on the world stage (Cocco de Filippis, Fernández-Asenjo, Manley). His establishment of Acción Feminista Dominicana and support of women's suffrage are generally acknowledged to be a part of this larger authoritarian strategy. After Trujillo, although Balaguer is known for appointing female provincial governors, there was a continued emphasis on women's traditional roles as mothers of the nation (Manley 7). This continued emphasis on the decidedly public role of women who were also meant to uphold the nation's maternal ideal resulted in a contradiction in Dominican feminism as, during the Balaguerato, these women increasingly developed their ideas within an international setting while still navigating patriarchal national demands (Manley 7). The long-term influence of this tension between traditionalism and emerging feminist ideals have resulted in what Denise Paiewonsky sees as an incomplete transformation of social institutions that influence the roles of women—namely the family and the Catholic Church (333). Paiewonsky asserts that the pervasive discourse related to traditional family structures—regardless of party affiliation or the reality of what families in the country actually look like—sets the Dominican Republic apart from other Latin American countries where there tends to be a party that favors more progressive roles for women (335-336). This reinforces the idea that early developments of Dominican feminism under authoritarian leadership have had a lasting effect. As Paiewonsky argues in her 2004 essay, “Aquí la ‘crisis de la familia’ se identifica como el origen de prácticamente todos los males que aquejan a la Sociedad. La responsabilidad de la familia en la preservación de la estabilidad social y los valores morales se enfatiza cada vez más” (334). One can argue, then, that the privileged position of the Dominican family and its maternal female role contribute to

Jacqueline Jiménez Polanco's assessment that in the Dominican idea of nation, "...la diversidad, el disenso y el conflicto (sobre todo el conflicto organizado) han sido históricamente interpretados como un mal contrario a las 'buenas costumbres'..." (315). It is also worth emphasizing, as Paiwonsky does in her essay, that, in many ways, the strengthening of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by a reactionary conservative turn in terms of social values and roles that were seen to be threatened by previous decades of embracing the role of the welfare state (335). In other words, this history of Dominican feminism is key for understanding how the widespread emphasis on traditional family-based social roles often impedes the possibility of other forms of group solidarity. Moreover, the lack of solidarity between Juana and the other women in the play functions as one symptom of the strengthening of patriarchal structures at a Dominican national level that were reinforced by a conservative turn in global politics.

In this context, rather than a simple and nostalgic call for a return to the "madre patria," the ending of *Por hora* imagines female solidarity as an alternative to the violently gendered structuring of normative Dominican sociality. As the immigration officials enter the scene toward the end, Juana's daughters arrive from the Dominican Republic almost simultaneously. One of the daughters evokes a rural and nostalgic image of returning to the island, saying, "Aquí no, aquí no, hay una escuela grande en Santo Domingo. Aunque me quede lejos yo quiero ir allí, esto es más lejos. Allí está mi abuelita, mi gato Tito, la gallina jabá y hasta una hortaliza hice con mama, me gusta más allá, quiero estar allá, allá" (261). Moments later, Juana further contributes to the nostalgic view of this return, saying, "...La gente solo habla de que si ya aplicaste para welfare, que si te vas a casar con ese boricua para hacer residencia, mire yo soy muy pobre aquí y en mi campo, pero por lo menos pensaba que si sembraba 10 matas de batata,

iba a conseguir 50 batatas y son más, óigase bien y el conuco también” (262). In this sense, Juana and her two daughters do evoke a jíbaro-esque image of labor on the island that is rhetorically a stark contrast to the cruelty of the economic situation for immigrants in the United States, but that falls into the same pitfalls of the jíbaro, who is a symbol for an idealized form of national identity rather than a representation of economic realities. At the same time, one can also see here that Juana and her daughters dream of returning to their mother/grandmother to live. Given the patriarchal structure of Dominican society, the lack of men and of the traditional nuclear family structure is significant and also provides a stark contrast to the tense and often impossible relationships between the women working in the factory. Ultimately, *Por hora* gestures toward a future where female sociality outside of a male-dominated structure like the one staged in the play is a real possibility.

Conclusion: On Failed Migration Under Neoliberalism

These three plays arrive at the impasse of the neoliberal moment in distinct ways. Unlike *La carreta* where difficulties and death on the mainland suggest poetic justice for the abandonment of cultural roots and a return to the island is the answer to the degrading situation in which the family finds themselves, *Malasangre*, *Indocumentados*, and *Por hora* highlight migrant laborers in a neoliberal world of exhausted options and impossible returns. In *Malasangre*, two specific moments that evoke the experience of impasse are foregrounded—Rubén standing on the bomb in Vietnam, ready to explode, and Luna standing before the audience in the final moments of the play, immobile and with her ripped up plans floating down around her. Luna’s simultaneous rejection of her new life as a laborer on the U.S. mainland and her lack of movement toward returning to the island draw the audience into the impasse of her situation. In *Indocumentados*, the audience is drawn into a similar kind of impasse as Gregorio’s

death completes a cycle that reinforces the difficulties faced by all migrant and diasporic laborers—whether they are citizens or undocumented—under neoliberalism. Finally, in *Por hora*, the impasse emerges as Juana attempts to establish a relationship of solidarity with the other women in the factory only to discover that the fragmenting force of the neoliberal sweat shop makes this kind of solidarity an impossibility.

However, and in contradiction with Berlant’s use of the concept of impasse which, as mentioned above, implies a state of crisis that overwhelms and extends the present moment, all three plays work to disrupt the seeming inevitability of neoliberalism’s hold as they evoke, if only partially or momentarily, ways of being with others that show “capitalism’s ostensible ‘realism’...to be nothing of the sort” (Fisher 16). In other words, the plays work to reveal the inconsistent and contrived nature of neoliberalism, calling into question the myth of its “natural” logic. *Malasangre* does this through a combination of social realist or often almost “panfleto político” critiques and an embodied rejection of all political and economic options considered—a “none-of-the-above” stance that finds possibility in the waiting together for something new. *Indocumentados* uses metadramatic techniques to underscore the constructedness of the migrant laborer and closed national identities, which simultaneously underscores the possibility of “acting” differently and in coalition across inter-Caribbean diasporic borders. And *Por hora* highlights an imagined feminine solidarity that includes her mother and daughters and that starkly contrasts with the impossibility of solidarity in the factory space earlier in the play. The kind of impasse evoked in these plays, like Ruiz’s previously mentioned theorization of waiting in a Puerto Rican context, is an opening toward the future that has the potential to cut through the continuing crisis that is the precarious neoliberal present.

In this way, these three plays arrive at the “decolonizing impetus of failure” (88) that Halberstam highlights in his work. Rather than approaching these plays in terms of their relationship to a history of moralizing migration narratives and the affirmation of national identity, a focus on failed migrations highlights the potential of these plays to resist the reifying impulses of neoliberalism. In all of the instances described above, the laborer protagonists of the plays fail to find economic success, to be productive and to fit seamlessly into a globalized circuit of migrant labor. If work is at the center of claims to citizenship and belonging in neoliberal times, then these three plays fail toward finding relationships and belonging on different terms.

Chapter 2. Together in the Hold: Solo Performance Art in the Puerto Rican and Dominican Diasporas

Introduction:

In 2012, President Barack Obama delivered a speech after signing the first iteration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which granted temporary status and work authorization to a narrow group of eligible, young immigrants. In a transcript of this speech, one can see its basis in the deemphasizing of foreignness through commendations of innocence, exceptional patriotism, and educational or work achievements:

Now, these are young people who study in our schools, they play in our neighborhoods...They are Americans in their hearts, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper. They were brought to this country by their parents, sometimes even as infants, and often have no idea that they're undocumented...Imagine you've done everything right your entire life, studied hard, worked hard, maybe even graduated at the top of your class, only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about... (New York Times)

In its dependence on evoking an image of a non-threatening (“are Americans in their hearts”), essentially good (“done everything right”), even victimized (“brought to this country by their parents”) and, ultimately, productive (“studied hard, worked hard”) immigrant figure, this narrative that was spun in support of a somewhat controversial executive order echoes a long tradition of basing immigrant membership to U.S. society on these terms. In essence, a melodramatic narrative frame is forced that pits the figure of the “good” and “desirable” immigrant against evil forces that have to be overcome in order to prove this designation and, therefore, eligibility for formal national belonging. This address shows President Obama employing a rhetorical “casting” device, attempting to stir up empathy for DACA beneficiaries and, incidentally, showing that affect is central to popular opinions and discourse about immigrants.

There is a lot in this brief excerpt to unpack regarding President Obama's characterization of young, unauthorized immigrants—especially in conjunction with the infamous “Deporter-in-Chief” nickname that he earned during his presidency³³. However, I am most interested in the melodramatic framing he uses as an exaggerated appeal to affect and in the connection between this framing and the notion of productivity. It is between these two concepts that we see emerge a messy coalition between nation and the neoliberal economy that furthers its own strategies of legitimization and inclusion by organizing bodies through affect. On the one hand, national belonging is mediated by the ability to name suffering and inspire empathy on the basis of a virtuous overcoming of the odds. Elisabeth Anker explains this succinctly in her book, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*, pointing to “...conventions of a genre form that portrays dramatic events through moral polarities of good and evil, overwhelmed victims, heightened affects of pain and suffering, grand gestures, astonishing feats of heroism, and the redemption of virtue” (2). In short, rhetorical genre, which frames the issue of immigration in terms of heightened affect, is a strategy that legitimizes claims of access to rights and inclusion in the nation. On the other hand, one must keep in mind that while this is rhetorically framed in moral terms, what is at stake is the issue of productivity within the national economy, which is inextricable from its global counterpart. Moreover, affect itself, rather than being set apart from a neoliberal economics, is subsumed by contemporary market logic. Whether it is being packaged and monetized in the form of care labor or incorporated into

³³ While a single point of origin for this nickname is difficult to identify, “Deporter-in-Chief” was a term used widely by immigrant-rights groups and, in turn, by the media during Barack Obama's presidency. In spite of its nuance, an article published by the Immigration Policy Institute lends credence to this characterization of the Obama administration when they explain, “While the Obama administration record is characterized by much higher removals than preceding administrations, it also shows less focus on increasing absolute numbers of overall deportations and a higher priority on targeting the removals of recently arrived unauthorized immigrants and criminals” (Chishti et al.). In essence, the good versus evil dichotomy was used not only to narrowly further the general cause of immigrant rights but also to justify the high number of deportations.

marketing and networking strategies where “emotions are acquired, invested, traded, and speculated upon” (Smith 6), the way that neoliberalism collapses divisions between private, political and economic spheres is frequently noted by scholars.³⁴ It follows, then, that a Manichean melodramatic framing of the politics of immigration and an emphasis on the importance of productivity for legitimizing immigrants’ inclusion in national life both highlight the “correctness” or even moral “goodness” of certain expressions of affect to the exclusion of other non-productive expressions.

With this in mind, this chapter turns to solo performances in the Puerto Rican and Dominican diasporas that challenge these strategies of legitimization not only on the basis of genre but also in claiming space for the emergence of new ways of relating and belonging that exist outside the market-based logic of productivity. I analyze solo performances by one Puerto Rican artist, Javier Cardona, and two Dominican diasporic artists, Josefina Báez and Claudio Mir. All three polymonologues considered here demonstrate an awareness of the way that immigrants to the United States are framed in terms of melodrama and of demands for productivity. In terms of genre, I turn specifically to what feminist performance theorist Jill Dolan calls the “polymonologue,” a solo performance that may incorporate multiple languages and certainly involves the embodiment of more than one cultural identity. Where Dolan seems to favor the polymonologue as a site for the reconsideration of belonging based on a simple

³⁴ As Mezzadra and Nelson note in their book *Border as Method*, after the 1970s, this collapsing of spheres that were maintained as separate under a liberal economic structure occurred as immaterial labor, or labor based on information, communication, knowledge and affect, expanded its dominance as the defining feature of the post-Fordist economy (19). The affective aspect of this contemporary style of labor draws on its corporeality to produce, as Michael Hardt says, “social networks, forms of community, biopower” (96). It is this aspect of immaterial labor that leads scholars such as Rachel Greenwald Smith to conclude that, rather than simply encouraging individualism, neoliberal economics integrate affect into an entrepreneurial system where emotions are “privatized” in the sense that they become part of an individual’s toolkit for forming alliances and managing connections (2). In other words, under neoliberalism, community and coalition are strategically managed through affect.

amendment of humanistic values,³⁵ I seek to reevaluate the possibilities of this genre in terms of contemporary Caribbean performance in the time of neoliberal logic. Drawing on both Caribbean ontologies and queer approaches to performance makes this move possible while also providing alternative strategies of legitimization and belonging that counter pervasive melodramatic forms. All three performances considered here employ anti-inclusionist performance strategies that are laden with queer potentiality. Overall, I seek to address the larger matter of the totalizing pervasiveness of market logic—here coded as a demand for productivity—by positing the space of the performance event as one where the reconfiguration of affective connections can take place. Moreover, I understand these connections as performative in that they can have identifiable material consequences. Ultimately, I suggest an understanding of solo performance in the Puerto Rican and Dominican diasporas in the U.S. as an aesthetic model that seeks to work outside of melodramatic framing strategies; instead, these performances emphasize affective strategies for building coalition and community outside the bounds of market logic.

Melodramatic Frames and the Politics of Immigration in the U.S.

An understanding of the impact of melodrama's moral binaries on a contemporary politics of immigration highlights the significance, by contrast, of the solo performance genre within this analysis. This impact can be seen in the way that melodramatic framing leads to reductive identification strategies by requiring an oversimplified intelligibility of the roles of victim and victimizer. In turn, the fickleness of this kind of framing can just as easily be used to the advantage of exclusionary national interests as it can to the advantage of immigrant activist causes. As a result, the logical implications of a melodramatic framework are essential for

³⁵ At one point Dolan explains her re-commitment to humanism saying, "...In a contemporary moment that even progressive artists and scholars are calling 'postidentity politics,' I'd like to suggest that realigning a new humanism with our hard-won nonessentialized understandings of how race, class, sexuality, and other identity vectors make us different as well as similar lets us work together to imagine a more just world" (75).

revealing the ethical shortcomings of a politics that depends on the formal structure of this genre. In analyzing these aspects of melodramatic framing, one can see that, while being a commonplace and, often, effective strategy for legitimizing concerns on both sides of the immigration debate, it is also self-defeating.

Returning momentarily to the ideas highlighted in President Obama's address about DACA, one can see the prominence that melodramatic framing strategies have achieved in the context of immigration activism. Several studies have shed light on the centrality of this kind of frame as the immigrant rights movement consolidated around the idea of access to higher education for immigrant youth who were brought to the United States as children, leading to the introduction of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act³⁶ in 2001. They have explored the way that the activism surrounding the introduction of this act depended greatly on a melodramatic framing of the young undocumented participants in the movement. For example, focusing an extensive study on the DREAMers³⁷ of Southern California as a regional movement representative of a larger national movement, Walter J. Nicholls describes framing strategies that were deployed by activist organizations through young, undocumented participants, who resonate with the "good versus evil" dynamics invoked by the melodramatic frame. Learning from the poor popular reception of the 1994 demonstrations opposing California's Proposition 187, immigrant rights advocates for early versions of the DREAM Act crafted a master frame based around three strategies: first, they encouraged the minimization of foreignness and the embracing of US symbols, rhetoric, and "bodily disposition" (51); second, they sought to remove from the youths the stigma of criminalization, absolving their guilt by

³⁶ The DREAM Act of 2001 "promised to place undocumented university students and youths performing community service on a path to citizenship" (Nicholls 31).

³⁷ This term refers to the self-designation of a group of youth immigrant activists.

placing the responsibility for their presence on others (namely their parents); finally, they developed the image of the "good immigrant" who is exceptional and deserving of formal inclusion (Nicholls 50-56). The undocumented youths' personal stories were a key component in DREAMer campaign strategy, but young activists were taught to not veer "off-message" as they shared their stories with the public by stressing "the hardships facing them as children, their abilities to overcome difficult barriers and continue to strive for the American dream, and the burdens posed on them by an unjust, immoral, and broken immigration system" (Nicholls 63). In these strategic choices, one sees the innocent melodramatic victim emerge alongside the evil forces beyond her control that have both led to her predicament and that continue to persecute her. If the several iterations of the DREAM Act that ended up before Congress over the next two decades and the final signing of DACA by President Obama is any indication, this strategy of activism could be considered successful. However, it also underscores the way that immigrants are required to present themselves intelligibly within the bounds of assimilable American values, effectively silencing discourse and even embodied practices that would complicate claims to inclusion.

Moreover, scholars often recognize that the use of the elements of melodrama in the framing of issues related to immigration can just as easily have a harmful impact that is the opposite of the one promoted by DREAMers above. This is, for example, typical of a contemporary post-9/11 United States, where melodramatic framing has become accentuated in the popular imagination and the precariousness of its effectiveness for furthering minoritarian political agendas has also become apparent. In this context, immigrants are often cast as the villains and the nation itself becomes the victimized party. This is what Elisabeth Anker sees when she argues that the media's coverage of the events surrounding the 9/11 terrorist attacks

underscored a larger tendency toward a melodramatic understanding of national identity (“Villains” 25). The “goodness” of American democratic and economic ideals produced a cohesive and homogenous political body that heroically defends its virtue—the “moral purity that existed prior to victimization”—against the villainous, immigrant Other (Anker, “Villains” 25). Recognizing these same moral categories that operate in a post-9/11 imaginary while connecting them to specific emotions, Wendy Brown further develops the importance of affect for the immigration debate. She highlights the fear of victimization by an evil and invasive Other that leads to increased border-building activity (116). In this way, border walls become evidence for the material implication of popular anxieties about immigrants. Further underscoring these possible ramifications, legal scholar Daniel Morales shows how feelings of victimization, however misguided, also have real impacts on state and federal legislation as lawmakers legislate “feelings” of victimization into law (56). Clearly, if legal status and rights are what is at stake for immigrants, engaging in the public sphere on an affective level can have just as many negative ramifications as positive ones.

Furthermore, the problematic nature of the melodramatic frame goes beyond the difficulty in controlling the way that immigrants are conceived of as victims or victimizers and extends to this strategy’s emphasis on the unavoidable existence of both suffering and an inactive—albeit empathetic—response. I agree with Ana Elena Puga who argues that these “casting competitions” (“Migrant” 361), or the power imbalance that is foregrounded as the lines between villains and victims are drawn either in favor of the immigrant or in support of the nation state, confirms that melodramatic framing in political strategy can be harmful from both angles. Drawing on the social implications of the melodramatic genre as identified separately by Peter Brooks and Linda Williams, Puga argues that the genre she designates as “the migrant

melodrama” (“Migrant” 360) works by concretizing a world divided into Manichean villains and long-suffering victims. For Puga, a migrant melodrama might unfold in the following way:

“...Exploitative coyotes, corrupt authorities, brutal gang leaders—prey on the vulnerable.

Migrants who survive the abuse are strong, determined, and resourceful, in short, heroes. Their suffering, in the tradition of all melodramatic suffering, is celebrated as a sign of moral virtue”

(“Poor” 227-228). One implication of this “migrant melodrama” is a naturalized emphasis on the suffering migrant as a strategy for claiming rights (Puga, “Poor” 228). In other words, the hardship and persecution faced in order to gain entry into the U.S.—both literally and in terms of rights, privileges and visibility—becomes merely a right-of-passage of sorts. Another implication is the ethical dilemma intrinsic to the “migrant melodrama,” which creates a “political economy of suffering” (“Poor” 240) where the spectator forgoes action in favor of empathy for the lamentable but perfectly “natural” suffering endured by any individual immigrant.³⁸ In essence, the spectator is placed in a passive position where “correct” and cathartic personal feelings in response to a melodramatically framed injustice are enough to convince her that she is not part of the problem or far away from the problem. In this way, in addition to being vulnerable to alternating castings of victim and victimizer, melodramatic framing is prone to naturalizing the very situation that it seeks to redress.

Seeking Productive Immigrants from the Caribbean and Beyond

³⁸ Here, both Puga and I are using the word spectator in broad terms to refer to readers, viewers of live or digital material, or even consumers of media. In her book *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*, Linda Williams was one of the first to apply a melodramatic analytical framework to general societal situations—in this case, black and white racial dynamics in the U.S. Also approaching the issue from a racial perspective, Elizabeth Anker further speaks to the role of the spectator of melodrama, emphasizing speaking to her passiveness in a way that complements Puga’s analysis: “Feeling sorrow for Uncle Tom and hatred at his owner, Simon Legree, somehow absolves readers of any of slavery’s reverberations in the present, or of action in the present, to, as Baldwin writes, “free us from ourselves,” as if all readers need to do is read the book and, in feeling virtuous about slavery’s eradication, posit their own antiracism” (85).

While melodrama relies on this kind of moralistic framing strategy, it also intersects directly with the concept of productivity, linking these two bases for legitimization in gaining access to membership in the United States. As Anker demonstrates, since the emergence of liberalism, self-reliance and individual freedom have been values that define ways for heroes to overcome adversity within a melodramatic framework (80). Turning in one chapter to look at the emerging dominance of neoliberalism in the 1980s, she emphasizes the transformation of this civic individualism into an economic one. For example, in Anker's view of Reagan's inaugural address in 1981, his "examples of heroism are solely related to employment, devoid of political, civic, or communal action...The speech brings heroism to the daily toils of the ordinary person and makes the daily toils of that life seem deeply meaningful" (105). Anker's analysis of Reagan-era rhetoric is useful because it sheds insight on the way that individualistic heroes became increasingly defined by their contributions to the market. Anker's insight into this trend of placing increasing value on market-based achievement rather than on civic duty is especially valuable for understanding the neoliberal mindset underlying the time period under consideration in this project, which is in turn enhanced by the rhetoric of productivity found in the laws and policies governing immigration to the United States as described in the introduction.

The legacy of these laws, policies and programs and the way that they encode a specific kind of laboring subject in their language and requirements does little to obscure the way that immigration policy that actively seeks out and shapes the kind of immigrant subject that deserves access to membership—either temporary or permanent—in U.S. society. These legal discourses are reinforced in the popular imaginary as they are recast as melodramatic narratives where immigrants can come to claim and merit access to rights and institutions through suffering or exceptional productivity as laborers. It is also worth noting that these claims are further

legitimized through family connections based around a traditional nuclear family structure and blood ties. Nevertheless, any such claims are precarious in that they are vulnerable to the whims of those with both popular and institutional power, which can just as easily “cast” immigrants as a threat to safety—both literally and symbolically. As in both the general cases mentioned and the specific cases of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, this perception, from an official standpoint, often coincides with U.S. economic interests in sources of surplus labor, in the Marxian sense. That is to say, whatever other affiliations that immigrants may value, before the law, which often exists in a feedback loop with popular opinion, immigrants are reduced to and defined by their labor power.

Performative Emotions in Performance Spaces: A Methodology

Developing further the concept of this feedback loop, I want to clarify how I see the performative role that emotions play in determining the inclusion of some immigrants and the exclusion of others within this historical context because it is key to my methodological approach to the works by Cardona, Báez and Mir. If both melodramatic framing and demands for immigrant productivity organize affect from above, then any counter to their influence must also address this affective aspect. This also speaks to the way that the performance space can be effectively used to engage in this resistant performance of emotional bonds. Thus, I speak of emotions as “performative” thinking along with Sara Ahmed’s work on the way that emotions, as relational reactions that are always “about” something can, similar to a performative speech act, shape objects through this contact. For Ahmed, emotions are “intentional in the sense that they are ‘about’ something...” (*Cultural Politics* 7). They arise in a moment of contact between a body and an object, which may very well be another body. Emotions have material effects on their objects. For example, fear restricts the mobility of its object and disgust actually works to

“produce ‘the disgusting,’ as the bodies that must be ejected from the community” (*Cultural Politics* 15). Ahmed’s point is that while they are elusive in their existence only between body and object, they have identifiable repercussions. Put another way, as in the case of J.L. Austin’s performatives, which emphasize an active rather than a descriptive function of language (Austin 5-6), emotions can have the same kind of active effect on the material world. However, different from Austin’s performatives, and as Ahmed is careful to emphasize, emotions always already exist in the context of a social relation whether they are intended or not. As a result, where the topic of immigration is concerned, emotions become performative as individuals, collectives and institutions react to them, leading to material social, political, and legal consequences for immigrants.

Engaging on the level of affect is equally influential when one considers that, on an institutional level, emotions related to a certain issue or about a certain group of people can sometimes be the only proof needed to justify a legal result and a style of community engagement. Legal scholar Daniel Morales gives an apt example of what I mean by this in his law review article titled “Immigration Reform and the Democratic Will.” In it, he analyzes the structural reasons for the harshness of U.S. immigration law by taking a closer look at the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling to overturn Arizona’s S.B. 1070, a bill that gained national attention for its intent to validate the “show-me-your-papers” brand of status checks as lawful during police stops. Morales describes how, after Justice Scalia issued his dissent to the court’s decision upon the conclusion of the case, “Judge Richard Posner criticized Justice Scalia for...failing to cite any empirical support for his contention that ‘Arizona bears the brunt of the country’s illegal immigration problem. Its citizens feel themselves under siege by large numbers of illegal immigrant who invade their property, strain their social services, and even place their lives in

jeopardy” (56). I concur with Morales’ response to Posner when he points out a disturbing relationship between the power of sovereignty and this kind of dependence on feelings, saying, “This word choice...permits another interpretation of Justice Scalia’s argument. Scalia does not need empirical evidence of migrants’ effects on the state economy because the people of Arizona have spoken through the law” (57). In other words, in the context of immigration law and policies, popular opinion informed by emotion—in this case feeling “under siege”—is enough to legitimize legal action.

Morales goes on to argue that in order to create a meaningful shift in popular opinion—which he refers to as the “democratic will”—it is necessary to provide greater opportunity for U.S. citizens to directly engage with immigrants in a personal and direct way. Morales argues that rather than the regulatory system that is currently in place, deportation proceedings should include a jury, therefore granting immigrants due process and shifting public opinion at a grass roots level (62-63). While from an institutional standpoint, one can theoretically see the potential for a gradual shift in public opinion over time, a problematic aspect of this institutional solution is underscored by Morales’ description of what one of these jury sessions might look like: “Citizens decide whether an ‘illegal’ migrant who paid taxes, has citizen children, and worked hard for many years in the United States should be permitted to remain here, despite unlawful status” (63). In this statement, the same issues that Puga saw in the “migrant melodrama” are invoked. The price for membership and for official rights in these citizens’ imagined society is still based on some measure of proved desert through suffering or exceptional productivity as laborers. Even so, I believe that Morales is on the right track in proposing a performance-like scenario as the answer for causing gradual and grass roots shifts in popular opinion.

If we accept Morales' assessment that closeness is an inescapable component of engaging productively with the popular imaginary where immigration is concerned and given the inadequacy of institutionalized bids for inclusionary membership, I propose that the space of the performance event provides an interesting alternative image of a public forum where these encounters can take place. In other words, I agree with Becker, Hernández and Werth in the introduction to their book *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First-Century Theater: Global Perspectives* when they claim, "Theater...brings the activity of imagining--often seen as quintessentially intrasubjective or private--into a public space, where it becomes a part of a necessarily interpersonal activity. Such imagining is an ongoing negotiation between different subjects, some of whom are spectators and others performers" (4-5). I would add to this that, within this space, the circulation of affect between stage and audience could be just as performatively powerful as the more introspective action of "imagining" named here. Also, in addition to being interested in the negotiation between kinds of subjects within the space of the performance event, I would reiterate that choice of performance genre can greatly influence the kinds of interpersonal interactions that take place. As noted above, for example, a melodramatic framing in narrative that seeks to claim rights and recognition can be self-defeating as it continues to reify the institutional dynamics that are responsible for the original exclusion. With this in mind, I approach these solo performances staged by three Caribbean diasporic artists through the lens of a performative affective framework that looks to see where the creation of extra-inclusionary space during the performance event can be shifted and opened toward a collective consideration of previously unimaginable ways of relating and belonging.

Toward a Queer Politics of Performance in Pregones, Cardona, Báez, and Mir

It is significant that, while favoring an affective approach, each of the artists considered in this analysis also challenges national, democratic modes of belonging based on a politics of inclusion, favoring instead a queer politics. While the term “queer” can be used in many different and valid ways, here I use the term following theorists such as Karma Chávez, Nicholas De Genova, Jill Dolan and José Muñoz, with emphasis on both its anti-normative and future-looking impulse. In other words, I approach queerness not merely as an alternative understanding of being in the world; I look to emphasize the way that these theorists see queerness as a way of existing in the present that gestures toward a real but so far unrealized way of relating. For me, following Muñoz, “queerness is always in the horizon” (11). This is complementary to the perspectives put forward by both Chávez and De Genova, who approach the term as political activists, affirming that “queer migration politics”³⁹ refers to a political posture that refuses the given politics of citizenship. Alternatively, to put both theorists into direct conversation, queerness is a “coalitional term” (K. Chávez 7) that “foregrounds a *practice* of freedom that can never be recuperated to the constituted status...of citizenship” (De Genova 106). They both emphasize the potential in the present for establishing, even fleetingly, relations with others that enact alternative versions of “more livable worlds in relation to other people whose lives, interests, and material conditions might be very different from [one’s] own” (K. Chávez 7). Chávez goes on to assert that, while these moments of coalition might be ephemeral and “precarious,” they are not necessarily temporary; instead, coalition that is established in a moment must be constantly worked at if it is to last (7). In this sense, both Chávez and De Genova understand queerness as moments of relation that cannot be subsumed by an inclusionary view of citizenship. As they reject formal citizenship as a legitimate binding factor

³⁹ See this specific phrase in Karma Chávez’s title.

in the relations they enact, all three works under consideration in this chapter seem to concur with this queer view of migration politics.

The latent potentiality implied by the three performance pieces in question here also accentuates their queerness, as they not only reject inclusionary politics but also embrace the concept that moments in the present can draw on the past while focusing on future possibilities, thus displacing the injustices of present forms of relation based on melodramatic framing strategies or the desire for migrant labor. While performances are fixed in time and place, with a queer focus on futurity, as Dolan and Muñoz suggest, they can aesthetically create moments that embody this coalitional potential. For Dolan, "utopian performatives", which are defined as moments during some performances that "persuade us that beyond this 'now' of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different" (7), provide this forward-looking tendency. Muñoz offers a slightly different view of queer temporality in art, describing it as "a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (*Cruising Utopia* 16). He further theorizes queerness as "a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (*Cruising Utopia* 9). In both of these moments, Muñoz highlights the role of history in relation to the futurity that he imagines and de-emphasizes the connection with direct political action in the present, focusing instead on the artistic representation of "nonbeing that is eminent." This temporality utilizes "the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now...a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 12). In spite of these discrepancies regarding the potentiality of the present, both Dolan and Muñoz look and imagine elsewhere as a space for belonging—somewhere beyond simple

inclusion in the normative power structures available in present politics. In a similar way, Cardona, Báez, and Mir draw on events from the past, which they narrate from the first-person perspective, to imagine the possibility of a new kind of space for belonging in the future.

This queerness is, however, inflected by Caribbean ontological approaches—something that is best brought to light in the context of Jill Dolan’s concept of the polymonologue performance genre. For Dolan, the polymonologue is an especially fruitful format for inspiring the aforementioned “utopian performatives” because it is able to explicitly embody alternative relations among diverse groups of people due to the shifts in the character that the solo performer enacts. Although Dolan’s argument these utopian performatives are closely related to the narrative possibilities of this style of performance is convincing, I believe that she attends too closely to the idea of a single actor embodying a diverse but harmonious whole and closes off other kinds of configurations of future relations. I see this when she writes, for example:

[The actors] use their ability to speak multiple languages, to embody multiple cultural identities, to bring more people into a discussion about difference and human commonality. Their liminal positions, at the threshold of social renovation modeled by the utopian potential of their transformational impersonations, allow them to see and help us to imagine, even just affectively, a better, more equitable world. (82)

While I agree with her to the extent that the polymonologue privileges the simultaneous presence of multiple cultural identities, claims of commonality and embodied wholes seem problematic in the context of contemporary Caribbean performance. As Glissant explains in his *Poetics of Relation*, speaking in terms of totalities and intelligible commonalities is a device of Western ontology that is contrasted with the rhizomatic disorder of the Caribbean, which is only disorder in the negative sense when perceived from the perspective of ordered, Western ontology. This is best understood in the distinction that Glissant makes between a Western drive toward transparency and a Caribbean emphasis on the right to opacity. He writes:

“If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you...I have to reduce...I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system...” (190).

In other words, in a claim like Dolan’s that understands a polymonologue as an embodied, albeit diverse, whole, there is an implicit drive toward reducing the Other so that they fit within the normative confines of this whole. Something will always be minimized or invisibilized in this process. As an alternative, Glissant proposes the idea of “the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (190). In other words, opacity does not refer to a simply self-sufficient and defiant independence; rather, always unable to fully account for its dependence on and interconnectedness with others, it exists as a singularity while remaining an open question. He continues, stating, “Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics” (190). In short, a respect for opacity supports the idea of an irreducible whole whose various parts move together but are governed by individual and open-ended logics and not by a single, essentializing, Western logic. The implications in this distinction for the way that I adapt Dolan’s concept of the polymonologue are that, rather than emphasizing a convergence of diverse identities being embodied as a whole on the stage, I see multiple and shifting identities coming into play on stage in a way that facilitates moments of recognition while also remaining open-ended and resistant to being comprehensible as the sum of its parts.

The concept of queerness guides my understanding of these works due to the way they not only favor a politics that rejects inclusion in the established national and economic frames while looking past this present toward a place where these norms have been transformed. Even so, it is a queerness inflected by a Caribbean emphasis on opacity, which also reveals itself in the

three works. As immigrants who situate themselves in the United States through performance, the characters in *You don't look like...*, *Dominicanish* and *Mondongo Scam* employ anti-inclusionist but potentiality-laden performance strategies that depend on an affectively queer performance aesthetic. In different ways, they upset the typical melodramatic framework that mediates access to membership within the nation and they seek to establish affective connections outside of the productivity required by the market. In addition, these performances, as spaces created around material bodies in the present moment, adopt postures toward the past—specifically Caribbean cultural legacies. Cardona's character is a migrant artist laborer who, after a racially charged interaction at a casting call, creates a performance that challenges this situation by seeking affective solidarity based in Blackness. Báez's migrant character uses disjointed language and movements to metaphorically interrupt a fluid image of transnationalism while also affectively basing solidarity in love and care, which become tied to Black performance traditions. In this way, these affects escape the logic of the market that would confine them within the feminine domestic sphere. Mir's undocumented migrant character draws on a queer Trickster⁴⁰ aesthetic, at least partially historically based in Afro-Caribbean Trickster traditions, in order to question inclusion based on the liberal ideal of possession. While working within the same solo performance genre, all of these performers engage with audiences in a unique way that situates them outside of institutional and popular U.S. logic. Directing their critiques at these structures while also effectively performing alternative modes of relation and solidarity that look beyond the limited hope of inclusionary politics.

The Laboring Subject: The Market, Logistics and the Legacy of the Shipped

⁴⁰ Here, I name Trickster with a capital "T," referring to the archetypal figure found in the mythology of a variety of cultures, including those in the Caribbean.

In addition to these queer modes of performance, which are inflected with a Caribbean ontology, a consideration of productivity and market logic in a specifically Caribbean context helps to underscore the potential these works have to disrupt and reorganize bodies as they engage on an affective level. As I have previously emphasized, while immigration laws and policies within the feedback loop of popular opinion play a substantial role in performance engaging with immigrant figures and journeys, immigration politics are always tied up with the global forces of the market, which serve to reinforce many of the characteristics of a productive and “good” immigrant subject that are encoded in law and policy. This is specifically salient in the history of both Puerto Rican and Dominican migration that is outlined above, which principally highlights laborers from these two nations as either viable laborers or liabilities depending on the historical moment. Either way, in collusion with the forces of the state—whether institutional or popular and affective—the forces of the market have an equally strong influence on the way that immigrant subjects are formed. For scholars such as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, the creation of this “laboring subject” (21) is, in fact, the main function of borders within the context of contemporary global capitalism. Rather than being ultimately defined simply by identity markers such as race, gender, or nationality, “laboring subjects” are defined by the productive capacity of human bodies and by the commodification of this labor power as a good that is contained and traded in the market (19). Glissant aptly sums up this power of the market in his *Poetics of Relation*:

...Within the pitiless panorama of the worldwide commercial market, we debate our problems. No matter where you are or what government brings you together into a community, the forces of this market are going to find you. If there is profit to be made, they will deal with you. These are not vague forces that you might accommodate out of politeness; these are hidden forces of inexorable logic that must be answered with the total logic of your behavior. (152)

My own view of the power of the market echoes Glissant: the logic of the market is a totalizing one that enacts itself on the bodies of those it envelops, dictating not only the way that they labor but also the way that they establish relations within a specific community.

Within a particular Caribbean context, Harney and Moten’s theorization of the concept of “logistics” is a helpful addition to the way that I have already explored this concept in the introduction. For them, “logistics” serves to illuminate how the logic of the market has both contemporarily and historically sought to “automatize”⁴¹ and arrange labor, mobility and affect. What is particularly illuminative about Harney and Moten’s perspective in the context of the current analysis is their articulation of the historical continuity, beginning with the Atlantic slave trade, of the socially pervasive drive to empty human capital of all subjectivity. In their essay “Fantasy in the Hold,” in which they consider “the historical insurgent legacy...of the shipped” (93), Harney and Moten theorize the way the process of “logistics” demonstrates the same impulse toward the production of an “automatic subject” as the early-capitalist design of the Atlantic slave trade. Thinking along these lines, capitalism in the Caribbean has always been experienced in this flexible, constantly moving and dispersed through both forced and voluntary migrations. In considering the way that the artists in this chapter counter melodramatic forms and demands for immigrant productivity, the impact of this specific, Caribbean historical context is helpful to keep in mind.

⁴¹ Harney and Moten incorporate the term “automatic subject” (90) into their essay, which is taken from the following passage of the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*:

The independent form, i.e. the monetary form, which the value of commodities assumes in simple circulation, does nothing but mediate the exchange of commodities, and it vanishes in the final result of the movement. On the other hand, in the circulation M– C– M both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself, the money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, disguised mode. ¹² It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an *automatic subject*. (255, emphasis added)

Going further in emphasizing the way that the totalizing power of logistics has, from its inception during the Atlantic slave trade, exerted its control on the body not only physically but also affectively, Harney and Moten characterize its control over laborers as an absolute emptying and negation of their subjectivity. They assert that “to work today is to be asked, more and more, to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to translate without pause, to desire without purpose, to connect without interruption” (87). This imagines a laborer devoid of any desire or intention that would impede the free-flowing mechanisms of the production of labor. This puts one in mind of the aforementioned Reagan-era framing of melodramatic heroes who, putting aside civic engagement, fully commit to economic productivity. Again one sees how all aspects of life, including emotion, are aimed, toward productivity. This empty subject is then related to logistics’ founding historical moment—what Harney and Moten refer to as “the first great movement of commodities” (92)—during the Atlantic slave trade. Opening further this analogy between slavery and logistics, they affirm that “logistics is master of all that it surveys” (91). In this way, both historically and during the contemporary neoliberal moment, the driving fantasy of capital is the idea that human capital can be disciplined into an unproblematic and frictionless commodity. If “...modern logistics was marked, branded, seared with the transportation of the commodity labor that was not” (92), then this fantasy is the legacy of the shipped, which is shared by laborers that are literally transported from one location to the next and by laborers living under the force of the logic of a neoliberal market that actively pursues forms of control that are similar, albeit in a more coercive and less forceful way. Not new, but instead consistent with its strategies of the past, neoliberalism in the Caribbean desires the frictionless movement of labor—and therefore of laborers—on a global scale. Nonetheless, the free-flowing movement of this labor also depends

on the suppression of all human attributes—desire, questioning, and connecting with others—that might possibly interrupt or stand in the way of its totalizing drive. Put another way, the productivity desired by the contemporary neoliberal market would displace engagement in politics while surrendering any affective connections beyond those that further its goals.

In addition to questioning and challenging the implications of misinformed popular opinions and their implications for law and policy within the nation state, this larger framework of contemporary capitalism based in a long and seemingly indefatigable history begs the question of whether or not there is any space for acting outside of this force. In many ways, this echoes a central question that the contemporary labor movement seems to be asking itself. In his “Foreward” to Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Sylvère Lotringer traces the history of the labor movement in stages with the first stage being one of a clear organizing movement around laborers and against owners with demands for higher wages and better working conditions (7). During a following stage, the autonomists worked toward more flexibility and control over their labor activity (13). Today, seeing that these characteristics of labor have been fully integrated into the logic of the market, Lotringer explains, pointing to the difficulty of organizing labor power in the contemporary moment, that “The global multitude is hybrid, fluid, mutant, deterritorialized, just like immaterial workers of the postmodern world, and yet, in mysterious ways, it is supposed to encompass the world poor which replaced the working-class at the bottom of the ladder” (14). The possibility of a single cohesive image of a global working-class has all but vanished. Due to this characteristic of the current precarious state of labor, the formation of collectivities—let alone the possibility of a revolution—can sometimes seem like an impossibility.

In this context, the creative imagining of new ways of relating become vital acts not only of resistance to the logic of the market but also as acts of survival. Especially in the context of performance in the Caribbean, I agree with Harney and Moten's implication that these strategies are as historically grounded in the Caribbean tradition as the emergence of contemporary capitalism itself. As part of the same aforementioned "legacy of the shipped" that is connected to the slave trade, a contradiction in capital's own desire for the frictionless movement of labor leaves open the possibility for resistance and relation. Returning to the quote above in which the theorists refer to "the commodity of labor that was not" (92), one finds reference to this contradiction. Although logistics, and, in turn, the logic of the market, might desire to contain and ship commodities, the commodities they imagine do not actually exist—they are "not"—because they are a capital's greatest fantasy. As Harney and Moten explain, "the transport of *things* remains, as ever, logistics' unrealizable ambition" (emphasis mine, 92) due to the fact that it is a "fantasy that capital could exist without labor" (90). This contradiction that is hinted at in these turns of phrase is perhaps more clearly encapsulated in the following statement: "Modern logistics is founded with the first great movement of commodities, the ones that could speak" (92). In other words, logistics' fantasy is powerful, as it does contain and move laboring bodies with great efficiency, but the human aspect of this commodity can never fully be erased. Harney and Moten explain that "every attempt by logistics to dispel strategy, to banish human time, to connect without going through the subject, to subject without handling things, resists something that was already resisting it..." (92). The drive at the core of the logic of the market that insists that human capital be a fluidly moving commodity cannot ultimately nullify the speaking, resistant, and friction-causing reality of the human in labor.

With this in mind, I also propose a reading of the performance events under consideration as spaces that, like Harney and Moten's metaphorical Hold, carry with them a legacy both of the oppression and of the potential for resistance and the imagining of other ways of relating that are not subsumed by the logic of the market. For Harney and Moten, this second legacy is based in an affective way of relating that they call "hapticality, or love" (9). On the one hand, it is an unsettling feeling dispossession that was first shared and understood by those whose history involves experiencing the oppression of the Atlantic slave trade. Or in Harney and Moten's words, "Never being on the right side of the Atlantic is an unsettled feeling, the feeling of a thing that unsettles with others... The hold's terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common..." (97). The collective aspect of these statements is not meant to end in an essentializing identification; instead, it is more akin to an idea of feeling alongside a group of strangers. As Harney and Moten say, it is "a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you" (98). If sentimental connections are usually produced through concepts of "family, nation, language, religion, place, home" (98), hapticality is an opposite kind of affective connection that develops in the happenstance of encounter—in being "thrown together" (98). If in this description one sees Ahmed's "economy of affect" reflected in the contact of bodies leading to the emergence of this feeling, the emotions that emerge are also lacking in "aboutness" as they do not find an attachment to any of the above-mentioned entities. In this sense, hapticality is an excess—"how we party" (99)—that serves no purpose in creating meaning beyond this radical moment that escapes from the hold but that points to a larger legacy with both a past and a future. Although performance spaces have great potential for reproducing the oppressions of both immigration politics and of the market, I propose to look for evidence of the experience of this hapticality—as an expression of affective excess that challenges market

logic through its very unproductivity—in performance that sees the potential for being together outside of the bounds of the logic of the market.

You don't look like...: Introduction

In *You don't look like...*, Javier Cardona addresses the logic of productivity within the market and the stereotypical strategies of melodramatic framing from the perspective of a character who is, like Cardona himself, an actor.⁴² Cardona is a performance artist, dancer, writer and teacher, who, in terms of identification, Vivian Martínez-Tabares describes as “a black gay man from the Caribbean, temporary Newyorican, supporter of Puerto Rican independence” (26). Cardona grew up on the island, working with the university theater group led by Rosa Luisa Márquez, Los teatreros ambulantes de Cayey, and later went on to train with other groups such as Puerto Rican dancer and choreographer Vívica Vázquez’s Taller de Otra Cosa, Peter Schumann’s Bread and Puppet in Vermont, and Yuyachkani in Peru (Fiet, *Reimaginando* 339). While he remains an artist mostly based out of Puerto Rico, he has often collaborated with a variety of US-based artists including dancer and choreographer Jennifer Monson and Scottish Director Fiona Templeton’s U.S.-based troupe, The Relationship.⁴³ According to Jossianna Arroyo, “contemporary performance art in Puerto Rico and its Diaspora has its roots in Latin American theater, U.S. popular theater, and modern dance” (154). It draws on politicized and often body-based performance traditions such as those theorized by Brecht, Grotowski, Boal, Barba, Filho and Bausch; and a history of Puerto Rican theater that, since the 1960s and 1970s, has sought to address “the realities of class, racial, and social discrimination”

⁴² The recording of Javier Cardona’s solo performance piece *You don't look like...*, which is available on the Hemispheric Institute’s website, shows one of the earliest stagings of this work.

⁴³ A Dance Review article from September 2002 in the New York Times describes Cardona’s collaboration with Monson in a multi-national project described by the artists as “a navigational dance-touring program” (Kourlas). The current website of Fiona Templeton’s The Relationship, which is actually a London and New York-based troupe, also lists Javier Cardona as a collaborator in several ongoing projects.

(Arroyo 154). This is true on the island in older groups such as El Tajo del Alacrán and Anamú and for more contemporary artists such as Teresa Hernández and those working in collectives such as Agua, Sol y Sereno and ...Y No Había Luz.⁴⁴ In the diaspora, the same political and embodied performance techniques are utilized in well-established groups such as Pregones Theater and the Puerto Rican Traveling theater, which merged in 2013 (Lee). As a result of an extensive relationship with this variety of performance traditions, Cardona's performance history and influences provide a circulatory image of the way that performance styles are transmitted not only between the island and the diaspora but also throughout Latin America.

Attending to the fact that *You Don't Look Like...* begins by questioning Puerto Rican identity and ends with a literal question about a more general blackness, I highlight the queer move made between the framing of the photographs and the final dance, connecting this to the concept of hapticality, an unproductive affect that exists in opposition to logic, legibility, and the confinement of the figurative Hold. For a non-Puerto Rican audience, Cardona gestures toward a potential for relation outside of the confines of the totalizing logic of market productivity as he shifts the audience/performer relationship in two ways: first, he uses a mirror to force the spectator's gaze back onto itself; second, he further challenges the spectator's consumption of the performance as he moves from frozen images to dance. Cardona begins the performance with a backpack emblazoned with the Puerto Rican flag strapped to his back as he runs several laps around the stage before starting to speak. Almost immediately, he begins interacting directly with the audience, carrying around a mirror as if it is a camera and asking spectators to complete the audition for a television commercial for a water company for which he had received a call back. After transforming his character a couple of times—from a waiter to a conference

⁴⁴ These groups will be described in more detail in the following chapter.

presenter—photographs of Cardona dressed to represent various racialized stereotypes are projected behind him on the stage. To finish the performance, he continues to speak while he puts on dark make-up and an obviously artificial afro wig, and then he performs a free-form dance portion of the show before ending with one final defiant comment to the audience: “Ahora, ¿me habré visto lo suficientemente negro?” (Cardona 49). During the course of this performance, the New York audience is first put in a position to question their potentially voyeuristic and consumptive gaze before Cardona figuratively breaks the essentializing frames that have confined him throughout the performance, embodying a reassertion of his opacity.

Contested Mobility and Strategies of Fixing in Place

The second move described above—from fixed image to dance—is one of the most striking aspects of this production. The photographs of Cardona, dressed up like various Puerto Rican, Latin and Black caricatures create a contrast to the movement of the artist on the stage and his interaction with the audience, violently framing him as marketable, and therefore productive, within the bounds of these stereotypes. While Arroyo has already performed an exhaustive analysis of each individual image within a Puerto Rican, pan-Caribbean and Latinx migrant social context, I am most interested in the frames imposed around the images themselves that, in contrast to the physical presence of the artist on the stage, fix them in place, un-moving and vulnerable to the gaze of each spectator. Like the frame around each of the images, patterns of consumption and mobility in the Caribbean at large have, as Sheller argues, depended on “the violent ‘fixing of others’” (139) in place, immobile. These images, which are suggestively portrayed against a stark white background include “the black savage,” “the rumba dancer,” “the sugarcane worker,” “the jíbaro,” “the basketball player,” and “the rapper” (Arroyo 163-164). The images remind one of the coincidences between not only the market and the laboring body

(including the immaterial labor of the performer) but also in the supply-and-demand effect this evokes in the consumer of these images. In spite of the laugh-inspiring, exaggerated nature of the photos, it is this kind of immobilizing violence that underlies the entire performance.

In terms of this violence, the mirror also serves as a device that demonstrates how the gaze of the audience and the logic of the market coincide as it potentially undercuts the situational humor present in the narrative of the performance piece. Lowell Fiet captures this aspect of the performance when he remarks that the Barbadian writer George Lamming expressed anxiety about the laughter of other spectators after watching Cardona perform this piece. Fiet concludes that “Lamming solo vió la seriedad y el dolor dentro del trabajo y el artista” (342), and I would argue that this reaction responds both to the aforementioned violence in the photo frames and in the compounded violence of the mirror in the piece. The slash of the edges of the pictures is reproduced through the use of the mirror. The artist begins by addressing himself in the mirror, asking, “Espejito, espejito, necesito saber si yo también soy...” (Cardona 48). Leaving this statement open-ended, as signified here in writing with the ellipses at the end of an incomplete statement, the mirror first acts as a stand-in for the camera at a racially offensive audition, during which Cardona was asked to say the phrase “Bunga, bunga, agua” (48). Cardona then uses the mirror to “audition” members of the audience. If the violence of the frame of the mirror and the intrusion of the actor into the audience’s space was not sufficiently communicated, the scenario of the audition is reenacted with all of the impinging force of a series of commands: ““Okey, ahora vas a mirar fijamente a la cámara y vas a decir unas líneas bien sencillas: Bunga, bunga, agua.’ ‘Recuerda el personaje... dale más sabor... más... es el Caribe, más...ritmo.’ ‘Ahora dame tu perfil izquierdo, tu perfil derecho’” (48). While this scenario effectively inverts the spectacle/audience relationship within the performance space,

these commands direct themselves at the most bodily and affective level of control, demanding compliance and restricting movement.

These immobilizing frames are further reinforced by constantly shifting positioning strategies that might cast the audience in the role of the casting committee in one moment and might cast them in the role of aspiring actor in another draw one's attention to the power dynamics involved in this process and begging a question highlighted above in the context of melodramatic framing: Who has the freedom to perform the process of casting in this scenario? After the audience/actor rolls are inverted in the moment described above, they are reversed again in the moment when the actor stops running the casting call. Just like a solo performer like Mir, who will appear in a later section, might cast the audience as jury to his character that is on trial, Cardona intentionally casts the audience in a role that is inseparable from the problematic gaze of the casting committee. In this role, the audience must decide whether his performance is good enough to be accepted, or whether he is not productive enough or ingratiating enough and is therefore out. At one point, Cardona embodies the violence of this power dynamic, suddenly transforming into a waiter and becoming apologetic, exclaiming, "¡Disculpen, buenas noches, bienvenidos, perdonen...!" (48). A few lines later he apologizes again, saying, "Ustedes perdonen que insista con el cuento, pero es que..., la cosa no se quedó ahí..." (49). This meek and conciliatory reaction to the imagined, but plausible, attitude of the spectators creates a dynamic of interpolated mobility as Cardona's movements and words appear tentative and hesitant during these moments. Alternatively, perhaps the hesitancy that Cardona demonstrates in this moment is unintentional and represents the actor's—rather than the character's—actual state of mind. Either way, Cardona embodies this feeling of internal friction in response to the violence of the gaze. One of the most salient moments that shows this underlying friction is

when he talks about deciding whether or not to react to the request that he would wear a wig during the audition. He exclaims: “¡Mira, miiira, miiiira, miiiiira!, la cara se me calentó. La lengua decía mil cosas, unas para un lado, otras para el otro. Yo no sabía si insultarlo o darle las gracias” (49). This image of the tongue split into two sides completes the violent imagery contained in interactions where the subject reacts, questioning the legitimacy of their own will, when forced into the frame of racialized caricatures meant to be used to productive ends in the context of the world marketplace.

Hapticality in the Hold: Cardona’s Queer Being-together

In tension with the violent impingements of the frame and its double, the gaze, Cardona uses his body to question and upstage the impositions of market logic that seek to continue to box up the migrant artist and make them legible for use or cooption. First, Cardona uses drag in the projected images to deconstruct essentializing stereotypes and reassert a right to opacity. Second, Cardona’s dance functions as an exploration of what this opaque subject might look like and how one might relate to them on different terms. Gesturing toward coalitional possibilities outside the bounds of the consumer/performer relationship reinforced by the logic of the market, Cardona draws on the intentionally unmarketable and non-productive affect, hapticality, as a basis for future relations. In Cardona’s performance, it is this resistance to legibility that gives the piece a Caribbean-inflected queerness based in opacity, which, as previously noted, resists comprehensibility by gesturing to irrecoverable origins and influences that circulate around an always open-ended identity. Additionally, and in line with what Jossiana Arroyo emphasizes in her own analysis, this dependence on transformation into marketable identities can also be framed as a queer act of survival that Cardona employs and exaggerates here to deconstruct its falseness. Identifying this survival strategy as “cultural drag,” Arroyo explains that this kind of

drag “constitutes itself as the ‘performance’ of other cultural, sociopolitical, and subjective orders such as race, class, gender, and sexuality” (156). In other words, the use of “cultural drag” allows Cardona to deconstruct the boundaries between here and there, male and female, and Black and white. Deconstructing the logic behind the necessity for migrants to use “cultural drag” in order to prove their marketability, Cardona reasserts his own opacity by demonstrating both his inability and unwillingness to fall into any of these categories.

As a response to the deconstructive move that occurs during the performance, scholars have interpreted the final dance scene as a liberating act that functions as an escape from referentiality, and this does seem to at least partially account for the way that Cardona engages with the convergence of identifying factors evoked in the piece, including Puerto Ricanness, blackness, and the condition of being a migrant. For example, Arroyo interprets this scene as a “getting out” or a “liberation” from the gaze.⁴⁵ In similar terms that emphasize liberation from signification, La Fountain-Stokes sees Cardona dancing “in a frenetic way, that produces the most profound sense of liberty and possibility, where the seduction of the dancing body ruptures the impasses of language and identity” (“Translocas”). For these scholars, the dance scene, which is based in undetermined corporeality that is not already framed and packaged in a pre-given way, points toward a possible existence outside of essentializing discourses.

Rather than functioning as a liberating escape, I would argue that this dance, which is both unidentifiable in terms of a single style of dance but that seems to offer momentary glimpses of a variety of cultural influences, functions both as an affirmation of the opacity of the racialized migrant subject. In this sense, Cardona asserts a subjectivity that, like his dance, is

⁴⁵ Arroyo interprets the dance scene saying that “with a dance in which the body seems to be ‘getting out’ of itself through its own movements. Here, the dialogue—with other cultural referents, society, and the audience—is interrupted because the body is ‘liberating’ itself from the gaze of others, from referentiality” (166).

incomprehensible but situated within a history of prior influences and violent impingements. To borrow a phrase from Hortense Spillers, Cardona, as a racialized subject, asserts a way of connecting with others around him based in the “hieroglyphics of the flesh.” For Spillers, these “hieroglyphics of the flesh” are the mechanisms by which the body becomes flesh first as slave labor constantly marked by “the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives...” (207). If this marked body does come to possess legal personhood, it is only after it has been “transformed into flesh before being granted the illusion of possessing a body” (Weheliye 39). These marks are not erased in the aftermath of the end of the Atlantic slave trade but rather are inherited by future generations through the translation of “lacerations left on the captive body by apparatuses of political violence to a domain rooted in the visual truth-value” (Weheliye 39) that becomes then read, in the aftermath, as biology. In the context of Cardona’s performance, these “hieroglyphics of the flesh” become visible through the cuts made by the frame of the images, the mirror, and even the words of the casting agent. This flesh that is then emphasized in the dance, because of its relation to a legacy of suffering at the hands of political violence, becomes a problematic answer to the question “Am I black enough?” For Cardona, a connection based on flesh becomes the facilitator of relation within the space of the performance as this legacy defiantly “feels” a different and opaque way that is affectively accessible as part of this long history of violence but that is not made explicitly comprehensible to spectators.

In this context, where the audience has already been invited—sometimes quite forcefully—to engage with the violence of the frame and the gaze, which function here as “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” Cardona’s dance gestures toward a relation of flesh with flesh. After using the mirror and language to highlight again and again the contradictions of racialized, packaged identities, which, as the last line affirms, ultimately point back to the surface of

Cardona's skin and the violent history it implies, the dance within the confined space of performance evokes the "hapticality" of the "Hold. As opposed to the marketable affective labor often demanded of racialized, migrant performers and laborers—in the form of stereotypes they are required to perform—a turn to the haptic is the absence of productivity. Rather than falling into the moral binarism that tends to determine narratives about migrants in the U.S., Cardona seeks to reveal the rules of the casting process. He uses the polymonologue to establish affective connections within the performance space that are based in a lack of productivity in terms of the market, which, in turn, at least momentarily, acknowledges the potential for solidarity with others outside of marketable and essentialized understandings of racialized migrant identities.

Josefina Báez's *Dominicanish*: Introduction

If Cardona's performance stripped the body down to its flesh and affective connection based in hapticality, then Báez's performance piece does the same with language, denying its utilitarian—and therefore productive—function and resisting intelligibility to an extent that the casting process implied by a melodramatic framework would be impossible. Queerness is also central to her work as well as she employs the previously mentioned strategies of a queer politics of migration that values moments of coalitional encounter, however brief. In the recorded version of *Dominicanish* that I saw at the Center for Dominican Studies, the black box theater is dark as the performance begins, and a live saxophone plays somewhere out of view. After a few minutes, the saxophone stops, and then Báez enters, wearing a simple black sheath dress, shod in unobstrusive black Mary Jane-style dancing shoes and with her hair in Bantu knots. As she enters, her hands and body appear to contort slowly and methodically in Indian Kachipudi gestures, creating a defamiliarizing and dissonant sensation after the smooth and rhythmic jazz solo. After several minutes of silent dancing, Báez begins to speak:

every sin is vegetable
 ve get able veg e table
 refri girator refrigerator fridge
 com fort able comfort able
 comfortable
 Wednesday sursdei zersdeis... (Báez, *Performance Text 21*)

In these first lines, the tone is set and Báez's poetics is established as her voice dances along with the disjointed gestures of her body, code-switching between English and Spanish and exploring all of the accented speech possible between and beyond these two linguistic poles. At one moment, as Báez declares, "ando cantando / ing singing / veryveryveryveryveryveryvery good"⁴⁶, the "very", pronounced phonetically as [βe'ri] in such quick succession that the sound itself becomes defamiliarized to the point that it escapes from these linguistic boundaries, possibly straying into the linguistic territory of an accented Indian American pronunciation of the word or maybe emptied of meaning altogether. Throughout the performance, dance gestures and movements across the empty stage accompany linguistic migrations that occur both phonologically and spatially, as other lines jump between La Romana, "back home home is 107th Ok / full fridge full of morisoñando con minute made" (*Performance Text 31*), and New York:

Rooms for rent GED ESL free classes
 GED ESL Citizenship classes
 Smokeshop 24 hours calls 39 cents a minute (*Performance Text 24*).

All of these textual and live performance elements combine in a complex network of signifiers, drawing from Dominican, U.S. and even Indian realities, that expand and multiply rhizomatically rather than being communicated within a closed and legible circuit or moving in a binary, back-and-forth pattern between "aquí" and "allí."

⁴⁶ This is my transcription because the live version is exaggerated with more repetition of the word "very".

While many readings of this work have emphasized how it creates within the performance space a transnational experience that mirrors the particularities of the Dominican transnational migrant reality, for the purposes of this chapter, not as much attention has been given to focusing on the productive tension that is created among the global, the national, the local, and the individual through the way that “home” is presented within the context of the piece. On the one hand, this focus intends to address a concern raised by Duany regarding the idealization of transnationalism. He rightfully cautions against the overstating of the “counterhegemonic potential” of the concept, reminding readers that transnational practices can reinforce inequality rather than always being equivalent to a successful strategy of resistance against dominant groups and institutions (30)⁴⁷. On the other, I seek to explore the way that *Dominicanish*, in its assertion that “home is where theater is” (*Performance Text* 37) focuses its resistant and transformative potential within the context of the performance space rather than on an innate characteristic of a transnational identity itself. These points can initially be explored through the way that the performance character’s body resists and interacts with other bodies, spaces, and institutions imagined on the stage. Specifically, the way that “home,” as a contested concept and space within the logic of the market and of the law, becomes the basis for a performed resistance to the affective containment imposed by the market logic of productivity.

“Home is where theater is”: At Home in Public

To understand the impact of the resignification of the concept of “home” in *Dominicanish*, it is first necessary to understand the parallel between linguistic practice and resistance in the piece. The exploration of language begins when Báez, mimicking the stilted

⁴⁷ For example, see Sassen’s explanation of the way that while migrant-sending governments may promote transnationalism, laws and policies in receiving countries can reassert boundaries and control in a disempowering way (30). With this in mind, it is relevant to note that the Dominican Republic could be seen to promote transnationalism by having approved dual citizenship for Dominicans living in the US in 1994 (Duany 57).

voice of an instructional language tape, momentarily draws the audience into the rigid structure of the English language classroom with its demands for linguistic conformity:

repeat after me repeat after them
 repeat after them repeat after me
 Ar
 Er
 Ir (...)
 repeat after me iu you
 me da verguenza poner la boca así (*Performance Text 177*)

The embarrassment expressed in this last line transforms into defiance in other moments, as the performance character asserts her rejection of linguistic assimilation and non-compliance with the rules of this institutional environment that imposes its own societal values, turning one into “another person:”

Gosh, to pronounce one little phrase on must
 become another person with the mouth all twisted
 yo no voy a poner la boca así como un guante (*Performance Text 22*)

This resistance becomes outright rejection, as she finds new teachers:

Last saturday my teachers sang in Soul train
 Now, I don't care how my mouth look
 I like what I'm saying (*Performance Text 28*).

Her new teachers, who are referenced several times throughout the performance, are the Black and Dominican musicians (Pacheco, the Isley Brothers, etc.) of the time period that have her “frequent flying to the dictionary / grooving it diggin’ it,” exclaiming, “Fight the Power fight the power fight it” (*Performance Text 30*), transforming her tongue into a weapon for claiming political agency—“chewing English and spitting Spanish” (*Performance Text 49*).⁴⁸ This

⁴⁸ In the contemporary slam poetry tradition, words and language are often characterized as weapons of varying kinds. For Urayoan, for example, many poets within this tradition, which is also often associated with New York, “focus...on the Word as a means of politicized address or as a vehicle for relation with an audience they invoke, confront, or imagine” (xvi).

“groove” embodies a linguistic liberation but also hints at an affirmation of blackness in the doubly-coded phrase “Now, I don’t care how my mouth look.”

In the midst of these meta-linguistic riffs, which emphasize migration and an expansive variety of cultural, geographical, and temporal components that directly address the implications of globalization, Báez’s assertion midway through her performance that, “home is where theatre is” (*Performance Text 37*) stands out as a resignification of a contained, domestic and gendered space. In one moment, Báez, in character, references her neighborhood of origin in the Dominican Republic, stating, “Back home home is 107 ok” (*Performance Text 31*). In this line, the doubling of the word “home” effectively strips it of its principal connotation, as “back home” becomes the colloquial phrase in American English that simply refers to a place a place of origin. This phrase is not connected to a view of “home” in and of itself; instead, the whole sentence is delivered with the following phrasing: “Back home, home is 107th, Ok.” This phrasing suggests that, in contrast, “home” somewhere else other than literally “back home,” could mean something else entirely. In a similar way, the other reference to the concept also focuses on a secondary connotation of “home,” when “Yesterday in homeroom...” (32) is mentioned. In both of these cases, “home” in *Dominicanish* is disconnected from actual domestic space. In fact, actual residences are more closely connected to phrases that reference non-permanent and shifting living conditions. In the course of the performance, Báez embodies the voice of a housing posting, referring to “rooms for rent” (*Performance Text 24*) and also uses a card “to place a domestic but not a national call” (*Performance Text 44*). In these two instances, home is no longer a permanent or possessed space, and the “domestic” is no longer connoted with the domestic space of the home. While the word “home” itself is only repeated a handful of times throughout the performance, for Báez, home, which is traditionally understood as a domestic and

gendered space inhabited by feminized care-taker roles, becomes a mobile space of dispossession and an immersion experience that destabilizes a bordered and contained sense of the world.

As a result of this uprooted and uncontained sense of home throughout the work, many scholars contextualize *Dominicanish* within discussions of transculturation and transnationalism.⁴⁹ As opposed to transculturation, which focuses on solely cultural exchange within a binary relationship, transnationalism is a more expansive term that, using Jorge Duany's apt definition, encompasses "the construction of dense social fields through the circulation of people, ideas, practices, money, goods, and information across nations" (20). Within this context, Emilia María Durán-Almarza highlights the way that Báez's "home" is imagined as a transnational one that is "a portable site that can be embodied in multiple locations" (79). Camilla Stevens articulates this in a similar way, identifying the home represented in the work as "pluri-local and mobile" and connecting it to a new conceptualization of Dominican identity in general that is "deterritorialized, diverse, and in flux" (30). Similarly, Rita De Maeseneer emphasizes the same instability and disconnectedness from a fixed national territory, interpreting the performance text as representative of a transnational turn in Dominican national literature in general. For both Emilia María Durán-Almarza and Roberto Irizarry, this instability is closely related to a rejection of the domestic realm—and the patriarchal hierarchy that it implies—in favor of an urban public space and the encounters that necessarily come along with it (Durán-Almarza 79, Irizarry 87). Finally, for Sophie Maríñez, the image of transnational relations created in *Dominicanish* suggests the kind of rhizomatic identity theorized by Glissant that

⁴⁹ With the term transculturation, I am referring to Fernando Ortiz's (1940) use of the word, which refers to the encounter between two cultures that, in contrast to the unilateral process of acculturation, refers to the uprooting of one culture through "deculturation" and, in turn, the production of a new culture through "neoculturation" (101-102).

attends to, but does not collapse or reduce, the multiple spaces that, in their coexistence and contact, result in “lo Diverso” (Glissant qtd in Mariñez 152). In these analyses of the meaning of home in the context of *Dominicanish*, scholars have addressed what Jorge Duany refers to as “a key intellectual puzzle for contemporary scholars”: the way identities are constructed and communities are imagined across borders and other boundaries (19).

Adding to these analyses of transnationalism, it is possible to see how the making public of the domestic space within the framework of the Báez’s performance is a claim to relation that frustrates the market’s attempts to contain and depoliticize. For Wendy Brown, a gendered view of the laboring subject that comes into play in the seemingly contradictory rhetoric regarding the preeminence of the family within the logic of the market. This role is problematic because in every other way, the subject engaged by the market is a single and isolated node in a larger and efficient logistical web, and the family is a plural unit. Brown explains that within neoliberalism, women can either “align their own conduct” with the impulses of the market, or they can “occupy their old place as unacknowledged props and supplements to masculinist liberal subjects” (*Undoing* 104-15). Brown goes on to argue that often as caregivers both at work and within the domestic sphere, feminized work remains “the invisible infrastructure” that facilitates the perpetuation of the market (*Undoing* 105). It is in the refusal of either prescribed feminine role that Brown describes and the liberation of the feminized affects of love and care into the public sphere that Báez’s solo performance character enacts relation from below.

Specifically, within the performance space, these restrictions are resisted in favor of the public life and multiple voices of the city:

Me chulié en el hall...

La viejita de abajo no e’ viejita ná
 El super se está tirando a la culona del 5to piso
 Janguero con el pájaro del barrio

Me junto con la muchacha que salió preñá
 Garabatié paredes y trenes
 City (43)

Rather than being confined to any kind of domestic space, this passage shows the performance of a racialized character who moves in public spaces (the dancehall), who identifies with a variety of cultures in her immediate vicinity (adopting Puerto Rican speech styles and Afro hairstyles), engaging in gossip, associating with those who would be excluded from the prescriptive boxes required in the previous excerpt (a single, pregnant woman), and ultimately embodying “city” (*Performance Text* 43). Like the Kuchipudi gestures that do not quite correspond to the subject-matter of the text of the performance, the body of the migrant in the text resists conforming to the bounds of market logic. These kinds of contradictions are at the heart of the anti-inclusionary politics of the whole performance piece, as official documented belonging means very little to Báez’s performance character:

There’s no guarantee
 Ni aquí ni allá
 Not even with your guiri guiri papers
 There’s no guarantee
 Here, there, anywhere
 There’s no guarantee (47-48)

Resistance and relation are found in the body made public—in all of its excess and sensuality—that evokes Sheller’s “erotic agency” that is “from below” in the sense that refers to embodied practices that claim agency based on the vulgar, the popular, and the abject (30). In *Dominicanish*, aforementioned images of singing, grooving and dancing, along with others from text, affirm this kind of agency that mobilizes transnational identifications within the performance space, capturing ephemerally their “counterhegemonic potential.”

“Acts of love”: Homelessness and The Language of the Haptic

All of these images and strategies culminate in a poetics and a philosophy of performance that emphasizes the relational potential of these acts and words within the performance space and highlights the political potential of stereotypically feminine and domestically contained affects such as compassion and love. As Jean-Luc Nancy emphasizes, “Com-*passion* is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness” (xiii). This kind of passionate togetherness that embraces the dissonant identifications represented in Báez’s words and gestures drives Báez’s poetics, as can be seen as she declares the following passage in a declamatory voice:

I ain’t no bilingual nerd I’m just immersed in
the **poetry of the senses** **poetry that**
leads to acts of love. Like a prayer.
Like foreplaying, Poetry taught by my teachers:
The Isley Brothers (184).

Here, Báez offers a performance of migration that resists the constraining and prescriptive logic of the marketplace as it emphasizes affective connections—suggested by references to the “senses” and to “foreplaying”—in the midst of the experience of dispossession and displacement, thus creating room for the production of relations, albeit tumultuously.

These emphases on affect as resistant and relational circle back to Harney and Moten’s “legacy of the shipped.” Part of this legacy is that “modernity’s insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh... This is the feel we might call hapticality” (98). As previously mentioned, this “feel” is the opposite of logic and legibility that escapes the “hold,” which functions as a metaphor for the logic of the market, and gestures toward creating a poetics that exists outside of this logic and only inside the moment of meaning-

making between her and the audience during the performance event. This “hapticality” is most of all apparent in Báez’s language in as much as, according to Hypatia Vourloumis, “A haptics of language is invoked through the act of grasping signs and their non-signifying materiality as the event of communicability’s being...Anti-colonial neologisms, paralinguistic performances, texts, songs, poems, sounds that veer away from meaning by touching language’s materiality dismantle and reconfigure language’s being as a mere means to an end” (235). This kind of materiality of language is found throughout Báez’s work in phrases such as, “I U a e o iu you / you in a secret you in a whisper” (*Performance Text* 26). In phrases like this, sounds and words double and even triple in meaning, becoming more than a means to end by emphasizing both Báez’s physical effort in pronouncing the sounds and the collaborative interpretation required for meaning to be made out of them. *Dominicanish*, then, is more than an embodied representation of a transnational migrant performance artist, although the elements of that art form are undeniable. Instead, it promotes a poetics based not on linguistic legibility but instead on affective solidarity in the present that recovers and creates a space for relation in the midst of the impositions of the logistical drive of the market.

Claudio Mir’s *Mondongo Scam*: Introduction

If Baéz remains focused on affective solidarity outside of the bounds of intelligibility, Mir’s character, Casiano, searches for solidarity in various states of dispossession, thus emphasizing the opposite to values such as heroic overcoming and productivity. Dominican-American activist and theater professional Claudio Mir's solo performance piece *Mondongo Scam*, a playful yet confrontational aesthetic approach to undocumented immigration, is a solo performance that was originally written and performed in 1994 as part of New York City's Out

of the Shadows Theatre Festival.⁵⁰ A decade later, it was updated by the author in 2005 and performed in a variety of festival, university, and theater venues in the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico between 2005 and 2009.⁵¹ The performance piece is framed within the context of a courthouse where the main character, the out of status, and therefore undocumented, Casiano Doroteo Tapia, has come to defend himself against charges of identity theft and impersonation. While he outlines his case to the audience, which is cast in the position of the judge and jury by his address, he undergoes a series of transformations, as he embodies on stage the individuals whose identities he has adopted. The other characters that come to life have racial, sexual, and gendered identities that vary wildly, including, for example, a Jewish deliveryman, a woman who is waiting to go to the courthouse to get married, a Latino entrepreneur that sells a "magic" hair product, and an evangelical preacher. Interwoven with this series of embodied transformations is Casiano's migrant story, which, in itself, is not so different from the aforementioned melodramatic migrant narratives that Puga describes: Driven by a lack of economic opportunity and drawn by dreams of a better life in the United States, Casiano has left the Dominican Republic to pursue prosperity. However, this playful yet confrontational aesthetic contributes to an interrogation of the normalized understandings of "undocumented," citizenship, and sovereignty and leads to the generation of a productive and queer version of being-together within the space of the theater that centers on the use of trickster aesthetics to imagine on different terms American jurisprudence, the concept of rights, both within the United States and internationally, and the concept of property and possession at the core of both.

⁵⁰ This project was led by George Emilio Sánchez and intended to highlight the works of "emerging minority artists" (Stevens 192n22).

⁵¹ For this project, I had access to both the performance script from 2005 and the video of the original performance in 1994, which is held at the New York Public Library.

Migrant as Trickster

As the play begins, Casiano walks out on to the stage, stares directly at the audience with wide, deer-in-the-headlights eyes that over-accentuate the statement he is about to make, filling it with humor. He declares, as if confiding secretly to the audience, "I am innocent. I don't know anything about it. I wasn't there. I don't remember" (Mir). Casiano highlights from the beginning his self-casting as an undocumented immigrant who is an innocent victim of circumstances beyond his own control. Rather than casting a human enemy as the villain in his undoing, Casiano later explains with the same credulousness in his voice, "Yes your Honor the Mondongo is relevant to the case because it is a key player in the events that follow my visit" (Mir). Ultimately, Casiano's own appetite for mondongo is partially the source of his trouble as he is arrested and charged after being convinced into attending a friend's party by the presence of the cultural dish. Like other immigrant narratives that frame their experiences in the context of forces beyond their control to inspire empathy and intelligibility, Casiano's alleged identity theft offense is also framed as being out of his control when he proclaims, "The defendant is a victim of culture a victim of unnatural forces. He is what is called a caballo, a horse, which is nothing but a medium, spirits come and mount him, therefore he is a caballo... está montao, they ride him and his life" (Mir). One could say that this strategy of self-casting as the victim of his own alleged crimes puts a new spin on the top-down melodramatic perspective that would seek to impose moral order on his narrative, single-handedly casting him as victim or villain (Puga 227-228). The fact that the figure of Casiano is a clever law-violator who, driven by his own appetites, gets caught in his own trap announces the presence of the Trickster on the stage. According to Lewis Hyde's exhaustive and global study, and along with these three characteristics, Casiano shares two other traits with the mythical character. First, Casiano is a

shapeshifter who, like Trickster, can “encrypt his own image, distort it, cover it up” (Hyde 51) as he needs to adopt new identities to survive. Second, Casiano feels no anxiety about his law-breaking and instead spins his tales with Trickster’s “creative abandon, charm, playfulness” and affirmation of “the pleasures of fabulation” (Hyde 71) often expressed with lighthearted humor in spite of his precarious situation.

The fact that Casiano presents himself in this way is not interesting in and of itself. For one thing, he exhibits just as many qualities of another sly character who works from the margins—the pícaro who gets by based on his own ingenuity and wit, pointing, through his exploits, to unjust social structures and normative social realities (Dickson-Carr 35-36). For another, scholars have long made the connection between the role of the artist and Trickster⁵². Additionally, the figure of the Trickster has been greatly oversimplified in popular culture to the point that José Muñoz can reject his relationship with queerness because the queer subject is not a “trickster figure who can effortlessly come out on top every time” (*Disidentifications* 162), even though this is not the case in all of the cultural and historical versions of his character. While the playfulness of Trickster accounts for the humor of the piece, I am more interested in the connection between the Trickster figure and property that Hyde makes in the following statement: “Trickster isn’t a run-of-the-mill liar and thief. When he lies and steals, it isn’t so much to get away with something or get rich as to disturb the established categories of truth and property and, by so doing, open the road to possible new worlds” (13). I do not seek to question Muñoz’s hesitancy to draw any essentialist connections between the Trickster and queerness, but rather, in this particular work, and using Hyde’s assertion as my starting point, I analyze the way that Casiano as Trickster becomes a queer migrant figure that, to return to De Genova’s previous

⁵² See Hyde, Gates, and Ellis, for example.

citation, “foregrounds a *practice* of freedom that can never be recuperated to the constituted status...of citizenship” (106).⁵³

“This land is my land”: Neoliberal Rationality, Law and Property

The presence of property as a commodity possession traded in a globalized market is featured throughout performance piece. It first appears as Casiano explains to the “jury,” “I noticed since I was a kid that Nueva York was everything: 'Where did you get that shirt? En Nueva York, beautiful shoes! They sended to me from New York [sic]' (Mir). He expounds further on this association between the consumption of material possessions and the United States, saying, "I used to dream that I was going to have it all: clothes, cars, money, education, food, house. You see New York for us is like everything," and, "I had my aunt Victoria living in New York, and my aunt María in Puerto Rico, they used to bring a lot of things to us. I was used to US' used goods. My mother talked so much about New York and Puerto Rico that I thought they were connected by a bridge" (Mir). While these descriptions underscore the transnational relationships among the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States, the inequalities that dominate these connections are also present. In spite of the cultural and economic "bridge," when Casiano goes to the consulate to request a travel visa, he explains, amused, "The guy there looked at me like I was crazy when I said I wanted a visa. He asked me if I had any real estate or big bank account" (Mir). In this context, possession is connected to a global culture of consumption that is ubiquitous yet inaccessible for those without financial resources.

⁵³ It could be said that, as well as demonstrating characteristics of the traditional trickster figure, Casiano shows some resonances with the figure of the pícaro. For example, Casiano gets by at the margins of society by way of his own ingenuity and wit, and his exploits point to unjust social structures and normative social realities. These are the often-acknowledged characteristics of the pícaro character. However, unlike the pícaro, who ultimately seeks to become a part of the given social order (Dickson-Carr 36), Casiano seeks a different kind of belonging that is not bound by the restrictions of nation-state sovereignty. For this reason, in the context of my argument here, Trickster provides a better parallel for analysis.

This pervasive presence of the market and its logic is emphasized in Casiano's transformations throughout the performance. For example, after having lost his previously acquired papers, Casiano enters a church during a funeral, hoping to find "advice [sic] and a social security card" (Mir). The man offers to sell him the social security card of his deceased father, but when Casiano responds too eagerly to the offer, the man retorts, "No, no wait a second, I didn't say it was free...my father was the preacher, I need money" (Mir). In another moment, Casiano's character addresses the audience, transforming momentarily into a game show host with game show music playing in the background, and offers money to any woman in the audience who will help him to legalize his status, saying, "...5 thousand dollars, 25 hundred after we get married and 25 hundred after I get my permanent card" (Mir). This commodification first of transnationally obtained goods and then, later, of legal status, becomes all the more ironic as it is contrasted with the United States rhetoric of freedom and liberty. One character embodied by Casiano declares, "This is a free country, we give freedom and liberty to the rest of the world, if you don't want it we give it to you anyway" (Mir), and another parodies the words to a famous U.S. patriotic song, when he says, "If you are a lawyer then I can be a lawyer too, this land is your land? this land is my land from California to the New York highland, therefore nadie nobody is an stranger, foreigner, an Alien" (Mir). As market language dominates throughout the performance—even, ironically, in the words of a well-known patriotic song—the audience is invited to reconsider their attachment to liberal democratic ideals like freedom, liberty, and even citizenship.

In fact, through the solo performance's evocation of the performance frame of the court room and its situation of the audience in the role of the jury who, in essence, is asked to consider the performance before them as testimony and evidence, Casiano gets at the heart of a

contradiction of modern-day jurisprudence in the United States in particular and in liberal legal thought in general. Adding another kind of “possession” to the iterations explored up until that point, the audience receives Casiano's closing remarks: "Based on the evidence that we defendants have brought to court I didn't impersonate anybody nor assume any false identity, but in the contrary the spirits of Virginia Esther, Ramon Cortines Navarro, Ishmael Rosenthal, Brent Parker and Rev. George Aponte Solano possessed my body anytime they want [sic]" (Mir). In this final context, what kind of possession is being referenced? The audience is left to wonder and to decide. Is it the globalized market that took possession of Casiano, leaving him powerless to make any choice but the one that he made? What are the implications of dispossession and possession by an Other? Can citizenship be possessed through the purchase of or obtaining of documents, or is citizenship something that possesses you? In spite of his compromised legal situation, lowly pícaro-like status, and his condition as an undocumented immigrant excluded from public discourse—often cast in roles that are not of his choosing—within the space of the theater, Casiano is empowered as he uses his own audience's logic against them. He opens up space for the non-inclusionary imagining of belonging that is arguably the goal of a queer politics of migration. Rather than basing a verdict on assessments of whether Casiano fits the role of the proper and productive immigrant that is imagined as assimilable into both the popular and judicial imaginations, the audience as jury is drawn into a space where they can consider the implications of their perspectives, effectively judging themselves.

Casiano asks his jury to consider the law on other terms that are not based in an essentialized view of property and possession, main pillars of (neo)liberal democracy. Alexander G. Weheliye's provides a race-inflected analysis of property in *Habeus Viscus* that similarly questions belonging based on these ideals. At the heart of Weheliye's work is a questioning of

the liberal language of rights, Foucault's biopolitics, and Agamben's bare life on the basis of his concept of "racializing assemblages" that "construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (4). The same irony that Cassiano addresses in the concept of property as he tricks his way through the urban space underlying his fragmented and testimonial narration, Weheliye articulates as being at the heart of the way that the law "disciplines" the bodies with which it comes into contact, deciding who has the right to claim personhood. As it is with the migrant melodrama, Weheliye, describes the way that the defining feature that must be embraced by those excluded by the law, so that they may gain inclusion under the law (rights), is suffering due to political violence (75). It is also important that this inclusion ultimately comes with a price, being "the codification of personhood as property, which is, in turn, based on the comparative distinction between groups" (77). Referencing the notorious Dred Scott case in the U.S., for example, Weheliye describes how the law withdrew from the Black free man his "legal right to ownership of self" (78), drawing a line between the Black population and the "Indian race" which was treated as a foreign sovereign (78). Even so, Native Americans would always remain foreign unless they renounced their tribal affiliations (78-79). Weheliye describes this as "law's magical transubstantiation of a thing to be possessed into a property-owning subject" (78), putting the matter into terms that return me to my current analysis. When examined in this demystified way, the law's magical power to name property is no less plausible or uncanny than Cassiano's own "possessions" by others throughout the performance.

This dynamic within the work that more or less puts the notion of property on trial alongside the undocumented Cassiano transforms spectators' understanding of one of the final

moves of the legal game presented in the work. Toward the end of the *Mondongo Scam* performance, Casiano addresses the jury, saying:

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury: by taking the stand I stand a chance, a chance to stand off instead of standing aside or what is worse stand back. I choose to stand by to protect the things that we stand for, and remember that to stand forth is to stand in, is not standing in line or to stand in the way, it is to stand out, reach a conclusion by standing to reason and then and only then get up and stand up and stand up for your rights. (Mir)

In response to this statement, Camilla Stevens has concluded that the question *Mondongo Scam* poses to the audience has to do with whether they will stand up for immigrant rights "and understand that multiple cultural and national affiliations do not constitute a crime" (186). This is part of the message here--after all, as Jill Dolan suggests, the polymonologue form that we see in works such as *Mondongo Scam* is a privileged form in its ability to model the "fluidity of cultural identities" in a way that spectators might experience a more just and loving view of the world (67). However, the playful tone and the play on words by the Trickster, Casiano, communicates to the audience that the question of right—and their connection to whom deserves personhood before the law—might also be less transparent and logical than it seemed before.

“Está montao”: The Queer Dynamics of Possession and Dispossession

While Casiano’s tone is playful in its slyness throughout most of the performance, one moment stands out from the rest as a moment of earnest being-together that draws on another connotation of “possession” as “one of the most powerful modes of black belonging...an experience in which location, per se, is in deep flux” (Ellis 192). Alongside the commodity and legal connotations, when one examines the circumstances of Casiano's first “possession” by an other identity in the play, the term takes on a relational connotation inflected by the history of an other that hints to the out-of-time and out-of-place nature of the encounter. Casiano describes: "Give me that,' I said at the door. It had everything I need it. He was dead. I didn't steal it. He

gave it to me Ishmael Rosentahl wanted me to work with his papers, and I wasn't going to say no. (pause) From that day on I noticed I was no longer myself" (Mir). Dispossessed of himself, and still commenting on his experience with Ishmael Rosentahl, Casiano strikes a more somber tone:

I was him he was me we started el dia de los muertos. He was using my body, and I was using his papers, and nobody said "hey you're dead you're not supposed to walk around." There's more than eight million people in the city, no body notice if you or I died, if ten thousand die in one day people will notice, but then they'll forget because the next day you'll have ten thousand more walking the streets and nobody will know where they came from. (Mir)

In this context, this exchange in which Casiano becomes dispossessed so that he can be possessed by an Other, Casiano describes the solidarity that he feels with the other dispossessed and ignored people in the city. In this moment of possession, as Ellis describes, "...For an eternal moment, a moment during which nothing but paradox reigns, a subject may be both here and there; may be, or rather will of necessity be, at once in the current moment, wherein she can be perceived by others, and in another time altogether, perceived only minimally" (Ellis 147). In this moment, one once again senses Harney and Moten's "hold." Casiano evokes the "dispossessed feelings in common" (97), the affective tie between those who often find themselves at the mercy of the metaphorical "hold" of the logic of the market.

Conclusion: Utopian Performatives with a Difference

In sum, a reliance on empathy inspired by melodramatic forms and a politics of inclusion seem unable to account for the performance work of Cardona, Báez, and Mir. In *You don't look like...*, Cardona's dance highlights and draws on the metaphorical contact between the flesh of the performer and the flesh of the audience member, mimicking the fleshy contact of the "hold". In *Dominicanish*, Báez's outpouring of love, care, and haptic language rejects the domestic and problematic space of the home, which is the feminized space of the caregiver, and instead

circulates these affects freely and publicly within her performance space. Finally, in *Mondongo Scam*, a solidarity based in “dispossessed feelings” (Harney and Moten 97) is the antidote to a legal apparatus beholden to the logic of the market and based on the problematic notion of property. It seems clear that, in these versions of solo performance by Caribbean migrant artists, resistance, critique and politics are structured around challenging both the lack of feeling required by neoliberal logic and logistics and the destructive anxiety that has permeated global politics because, as Ahmed explains, “...To feel love for the nation, whereby love is an investment that should be returned (you are ‘the taxpayer’), is also to feel injured by these others, who are ‘taking’ what is yours” (*Cultural Politics* 1). Wendy Brown further articulates this affective conundrum in her analysis of the way that a growing number of “...walls respond in terms of both state policies and the anxieties of their subjects to a growing lawlessness lapping the edges of nation-states and streaming across them” (*Walled States* 83). As “potent organizers of human psychic landscapes” and “discursive statements” (*Walled States* 74), contemporary walls, then, reinforce nation-state identity and interior/exterior distinctions during a time when “otherness and difference are detached from jurisdiction and membership” (*Walled States* 82). Caught between a nullifying drive toward the emptying of feeling from labor and the wrong way of feeling within the affective field of the migrant-receiving nation, perhaps the migrants in the works in question are simply insistent on “‘feeling brown’ in a world organized by cultural mandates to ‘feel white’” (Muñoz, “Feeling” 68). Perhaps, as Muñoz suggests, this is not only an insistent and symbolic act of difference but also a strategy of survival.

A return to Dolan’s concept of the polymonologue—as inflected in this analysis by a Caribbean ontology—allows me to summarize the kinds of future-looking and relation-building moments that I have analyzed in these performance pieces. As they embody a variety of views

and languages on stage, all three artists challenge the binary and reductive form of melodramatic framing, presenting instead a complex and dispersed picture of immigrant subjects. Rather than simply amending humanistic values to contain diverse identities that emphasize a common humanity, these performance pieces highlight forms of difference that are always already contextualized within a specific history. Furthermore, rather than seeking to represent perfectly intelligible performances of the immigrant figure in the service of an inclusionary claim for access to rights and privileges in the nation, these pieces drew on not only a mix of language, which often veered in and out of easy comprehensibility, but also a mix of communication registers, as the body was sometimes foregrounded over speech itself. Countering the overblown passions of the melodrama as well as the utilitarian emotions required to be ultimately within the neoliberal marketplace, these performances demonstrate how coalition and relation can be built from within the physically and temporally limited space of the performance event through the reframing of affective connections, however fragilely.

Chapter 3. The Erotic Ethics of Tactile Textiles in Contemporary Caribbean Performance

Introduction

It began with my arrival at a 2015 exhibit at the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico called *Diez años de Y No Había Luz*, which was a commemoration of ten years of work by the San Juan-based theater group Y No Había Luz. The exhibit was made up of three separate spaces. From the main gallery, the other museum goers and I first entered a small room covered from floor to ceiling with supplies and objects from the group's workshop—drawers of art supplies, papier-mâché masks, puppets and figurines, clay figures in various stages of completion, paint brushes, heaps of textile, folded paper creations, books, flag banners, stools, and aprons covered in the remnants of artistic projects cluttered the space. After passing through this space through another door, we entered an expansive darkened room with black walls where several sets from past shows were distributed in a nonlinear fashion. There was a structure made entirely of papier-mâché human legs, a life size tree made out of paper, a large orb of a moon that glowed a bluish white against the black backdrop, a large papier-mâché man whose beard flowed down from his face in a billowing spread of white tulle netting, another glowing heap of blue netting with paper fish distributed throughout its depths and many other striking and uncanny large-scale, hand-made props and set pieces from performances in their repertoire. Finally, I exited the exhibit through another small room containing archival materials from past shows and a seating area where museumgoers could sit and watch a series of film shorts also produced by the group. This experience of entering through the Y No Había Luz workshop in medias res, surrounded by the remnants of the making process in the form of paint-streaked aprons, paint brushes and tubes of paint seemingly ready to use, clay figures laying on the work bench waiting to be further transformed, and stools waiting for the makers to return, drew into sharp relief the bodies and

labor behind the objects and videos in the next two spaces of the exhibit in spite of the absence of the artists.

One set piece within this exhibit in particular caught my attention: a large, billowing piece of silky, fleshy, tan-colored fabric that rippled with the air blowing from fan somewhere underneath. A search on their website after leaving the museum told me that it was from a performance piece in the group's repertoire called "Piel," which they describe in the following way:

En "Piel" la tela se transforma en esos tejidos protectores y permite que el mundo interior se desborde por un rato y podamos ver nuestro imaginario. "Piel" es una manifestación de la sensibilidad que habita en el mundo interior de los seres humanos, en contacto con lo externo. Mediante la manipulación de máscaras, un títere, tela y abanicos, creamos universos sensibles por los que transmitamos a diario, sin apreciar lo particular de cada instante. (*Y No Había Luz*)

This piece in particular introduces in a visceral way a connection between textile, touch, skin and the kinds of relation that circulate within the performance space based on the affective relationship among these elements. As the above synopsis of the group's website suggests, the connections evoked through textile as skin, which, I would argue, evokes in turn embodied connections at this most vulnerable level, open up the imaginary to new and deeply affective ways of experiencing the world. In the context of the museum exhibit, the added layer of entering into contact with this experience through a workshop space that prefaces the encounter with textile and skin with an awareness of the physical labor behind the creation of this and the set pieces and props that surround it makes it difficult to disentangle this piece from a Caribbean history where connections between labor, skin and textile have long been dictated first in terms of slavery in the context of a plantation economy and in terms of exploited and gendered labor in free trade zones. As a result, this billowing piece of textile in the midst of the Diez Años de No Había Luz exhibit provoked a series of questions: What kind of affective and embodied response

is inspired by the presence of textile in a performance space—a presence that engages the sense of touch whether or not any literal touching happens? How do audiences affectively connect with the material texture of these set pieces? How is relation theorized by works that emphasize this type of embodied connection not only between those on the stage but also between work and audience?

In approaching an answer to these questions, this chapter focuses on a series of works that demonstrate the prevalence with which Puerto Rican and Dominican theater and performance engage with the affective connections invoked through the presence of textile. New York Puerto Rican theater group Teatro Pregones' 1996 play *La otra orilla* begins with an expanse of white fabric billowing down from the ceiling at center stage; this long piece of fabric occupies stage left throughout the piece as one of the characters on stage sits and sews it. In *Ciudadana*, a film short by Puerto Rican director Llaima Sanfiorenzo of the storytelling film workshop group Self Portrait Factory retells the story of Lolita Lebrón's involvement in the 1954 shooting at the U.S. Congress while foregrounding the physical sewing process involved in creating the suit Lebrón wore that day. According to the stage directions of Dominican playwright Chiqui Vicioso's 1996/1997 play *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*, a woman sews a dress throughout the play, finally putting it on at the end. In Dominican artist Joiri Minaya's performance and mural piece *Siboney*, Minaya documents her painstaking creation and later smearing of a painted mural representation of a tropical print textile. While differing in genre and purpose, these four works represent a trend in the last few decades of Puerto Rican and Dominican performance—represented here in theater, film, performance art, and visual art—that draws together, through the tactile presence of textile, a simultaneous engagement with themes of female labor and the garment industry.

While, thematically, in Chapter 1, Elizabeth Ovalle's play *Por hora y a piece-work* provides an opening to consider this relationship because it is set in a garment factory, the topic of this chapter departs from that analysis in its focus on the physical presence of textile on the stage and the affective effect of this material in relation to the spectator. If Chapter 1, in its analysis of Roberto Ramos Perea's *Malasangre: La nueva emigración*, José Luis Ramos Escobar's *Indocumentados: El otro merengue* and Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a piece-work*, focuses on the way that staged narratives of failed migration tentatively seek forms of solidarity that look beyond the bounds of an entrenched neoliberalism, and Chapter 2 analyzes the way that Puerto Rican and Dominican solo performance—through the use of the polymonologue—emphasizes affective strategies for building coalition and community outside the bounds of market logic, this final chapter centers the way that the presence of textile in these works facilitates an encounter with a precarious Other that invites spectators to imagine a reconfiguration of the way that neoliberalism orders bodies on a global scale and holds them in their place. This is not to say that the pieces under consideration here fall into moral didacticism but that, rather than prescribing a specific moral imperative, they all, to a certain extent, participate in a Levinasian mode of “performance as ethical practice” (Ridout 54). In other words, they favor an understanding of theater as ethical encounter between stage and audience parallel to the way that Levinas understands ethical responsibility to be born in the encounter between the vulnerable face of the Other and “myself.” Specifically, I argue that through the use of texture and textile onstage, these works invite spectators into an encounter with a displaced Other whose labor made the palpable existence of the prop or set piece possible. Moreover, I argue that this encounter invites spectators to reorient their understanding of their everyday interactions with garments and textile in a way that challenges the distance between laborer and

consumer and the diffuse sense of responsibility that this distance implies.⁵⁴ In so doing, the works simultaneously invite spectators to extrapolate from this aesthetic relationship with cloth a political relationship where the current global distribution of labor is denaturalized and therefore open to transformation.

The Caribbean Garment Industry and the Logic of Logistics

The concept of logistics provides a helpful basis for understanding the way that the garment industry has long-organized laboring bodies within geographical space. Moreover, the dependence of logistics on maintaining distance between bodies at different points along a supply chain provides a helpful point of contrast to how the presence of textile on stage in the works under consideration here invokes connection and collectivity. If on the one hand, the parallel processes of globalization and neoliberalism have functioned to make the world seem closer and more connected than ever through supply chain systems that seem to quickly and effortlessly move parts and products toward consumers, these same supply chains function to fix each stop and body along the chain in place and obscure any sense of responsibility that might be felt between those on either end. A logic of logistics organizes laboring bodies according to their most efficient role within the global economy. While the term “logistics,” taken in its most technical sense, refers to a science of supply chain management,⁵⁵ the underlying logic of this field exemplifies neoliberalism’s inherent drive toward unrestricted productivity and the minimization of the liability of a human labor force. Logistics’ defining achievement, the container ship, provides a telling metaphor for the way that its logic seeks to package and move

⁵⁴ In my use of the term “reorient” here, I am indebted to Sara Ahmed’s concept of “orientation” as a descriptive term for not only the way that individuals “inhabit space” (*Queer Phenomenology* 53) and understand their connection to the world around them but also the way that “disorienting” (*Queer Phenomenology* 24) experiences can shift the way that one perceives the world.

⁵⁵ This definition references Deborah Cowen’s use of the term in *The Deadly Life of Logistics*.

both products and humans in the service of these goals. As Marc Levinson notes in his book *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*, “The container is at the core of a highly automated system for moving goods from anywhere, to anywhere, with a minimum of cost and complications on the way” (279). A similar emphasis on systems of movement meant to minimize cost and complications can be seen in Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson’s theorization of the contemporary impact of borders on labor. Mezzadra and Neilson emphasize the way that borders have multiplied under neoliberalism leading to the continued mobility of some and the simultaneous further regulation and containment of the movement of others (19). For Mezzadra and Neilson, due to the fact that labor as commodity is inseparable from the body, “...its ‘container’ must continuously be reaffirmed and retraced” (19). In other words, a global economy that depends on the containerization of goods is equally dependent on the disciplined containment of laboring bodies. Responding to this this way that logistics contains, rearranges, and mobilizes human lives in the name of ever greater efficiency, Deborah Cowen argues in her book *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, “Logistics is no simple story of securitization or of distribution; it is an industry and assemblage that is at once bio-, necro-, and antipolitical” (4). In its most insidious form, this “bio-, necro-, and antipolitical” logic at the heart of logistics is what Sayek Valencia refers to as “gore capitalism,” which “refers to the undisguised and unjustified bloodshed that is the price the Third World pays for adhering to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism” (19). In this way, logistics is a logic that buttresses—in the supposedly benign terms of efficiency—the apparatuses of the state that work to include and exclude, to expel and contain, and to move or immobilize populations.

There is a similar logistical drive behind the modern factory, the assembly-line, city planning and modernization strategies with their often-similar emphasis on increased efficiency and production—a connection that is particularly salient in a Caribbean context due to the almost coterminous emergence of the science of logistics and the Puerto Rican project of industrialization. According to Cowen, logistics made its leap from military strategy to business management strategy in the aftermath of World War I and then World War II due to these wars' increasing dependence on the strategic and secure movement of fuel and weapons (29-31). During this same time period, Operation Bootstrap was carried out in Puerto Rico, which was a top-down plan of modernization and industrialization that depended heavily on the efficient redistribution and control of the Puerto Rican population through encouraged migration to the U.S. mainland. Moreover, this economic plan further depended on population control and containment at a bodily level in its parallel emphasis on family planning which led to the sterilization of approximately one third of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age (*La operación*). While the Dominican Republic was not the target of this kind of systematic and coordinated population control effort, a similar pattern of industrialization and an accompanying increase in emigration occurred there from the 1970s through the 1990s.⁵⁶ In this way, modernization projects on both islands in the Caribbean emerged alongside this legacy of the emergence of logistics as an organizing logic.

In all of the works considered in this chapter, confinement and movement are featured in tension with one another. In *La otra orilla*, the small stage becomes a raft that both confines and transports the migrant characters onstage and evokes the relentlessly efficient containment and control associated with the movement of goods and labor across the sea. In *Wish-ky Sour*, the

⁵⁶ See Grosfoguel and Georas and Icken Safa for a detailed description of the way that Puerto Rico became a model for “industrialización por invitación” (Icken Safa) in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere in the Caribbean.

dialogue between the two main characters centers around whether they should remain confined within the sewing room featured onstage or leave. In *La ciudadana*, it is Lolita Lebrón's work within the confines of a garment workshop that is most heavily featured. Finally, in *Siboney*, the circulation of clothing in contrast with the fixing in place of racialized bodies is central to the piece. In other words, the orchestrated movement or immobilization of goods and bodies within the garment industry underlies the plot or main themes of each work.

A focus on the history of the garment industry in connection with both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, a thematic focus of the works under analysis in this chapter, further illuminates the way that the logic of logistics has played out in a Caribbean context. Early instantiations of the garment industry in both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic occurred in the early twentieth century, and labor conditions were already dominated by poor working conditions including long workdays and low wages (Angustias Guerrero; González García). However, the context most helpful to my current analysis is the post-WWII context that culminated in the neoliberalization of the industry. In the Dominican context, in addition to the exploitative conditions related to Dominicans in the New York garment industry described in the previous chapter, one of the most salient impacts of neoliberalism has been related to the gendered dynamics that are both reinforced by and created by the prevalence of female employees within the garment industry in free trade zones on the island. As mentioned in the introduction, between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, the number of export-processing zones on the island more than tripled (Mortimore 298-299). By 1985, the apparel industry accounted for almost 20% of the country's total exports for the North American market and by the year 2000, this number had more than doubled as apparel-related exports accounted for over 50% of total exports (Mortimore 291). What Saskia Sassen has termed the "feminization of wage labor"

(111), which was happening on a global scale, was also occurring in the Dominican Republic according to a similar pattern as young married and unmarried women found work in free trade zones, making up almost 65% of the garment-related workforce throughout the 1990s (Werner 730). These statistics are in line with the general global trend that drew an increase of feminine labor to free trade zone spaces around the globe and made this gendered labor synonymous with being undervalued, poorly protected, flexible to the extreme and valued for its compliancy.⁵⁷ (Pessar, Sassen, Young). Gay Young could have been describing conditions within garment factories in Dominican fair trade zones when she wrote, “Privileged neoliberal actors—both corporate and public officials—scribe to women a commodity identity that devalues them and defines them as usable, expendable, abusable, and ultimately, disposable” (9).⁵⁸ Moreover, at the same time that feminine Dominican labor was going through this process of becoming articulated in terms of greater disposability and compliance within the global market, the lasting implications of authoritarian regimes which emphasized Dominican women’s roles as mothers situated within traditional family structures—which were in turn seen as key to social stability—continued to limit social possibilities for femininity in the Dominican Republic even while economic opportunities for women were increasing (Paiewonsky 334-336). The specifics of this Dominican context provide a basis for *Wish-ky Sour (Trago Amargo)*, where the main character’s work sewing a dress throughout the play connects the themes of Dominican

⁵⁷ Scholars such as Saskia Sassen, Gay Young and Patricia Pessar recognize this continued global trend of preferring female labor due to its perceived docility. This also motivates Sayek Valencia’s feminist critique of a “military-consumerist-patriarchal-gore-capitalist system” (262).

⁵⁸ In *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Melissa Wright discusses the way that the myth of the “disposable third world woman” (4) within the system of global capital gets normalized in the logic of global business practices that rely on this myth to justify exploitative employment practices. Sarah Adler-Milstein and John M. Kline’s *Sewing Hope: How One Factory Challenges the Apparel Industry’s Sweatshops* provides a useful case study for illuminating how this unfolded in the Dominican Republic specifically as well as a possible alternative structure to the sweatshop model.

femininity and disposability, which are prevalent in this history. *Siboney* intersects this question of Dominican women's work within the garment industry with the question of race.

In the decades previous to this neoliberal development in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico had already gone through this kind of economic transformation as policies accompanying Operation Bootstrap in the post-World War II era resulted in investment patterns by which Puerto Rico "became in essence the first export processing zone" (Whalen 46). In her study of the Puerto Rican and Dominican garment industries, Carmen Teresa Whalen cites a pamphlet from this time period that promotes the industriousness of female workers in the garment industry, emphasizes the laxity of labor laws allowing women to work at night and highlights the favorability of an industry with average wages that were only twenty-six percent of wages in the U.S. (47-48). Travel to the U.S. mainland became a necessity for many women as well as industrialization failed to create enough jobs to replace rural ones lost (Whalen 49). Here, Puerto Rican women became an integral part of the unskilled labor force, working in dressmaking, skirts and blouses rather than, for example, the more skilled suit-making sector (Whalen 51). As time went on, the transformation of the garment industry into an increasingly deskilled, contract-based industry resulted in shrinking wages and an equally shrinking dependence on New York City's skilled garment sector labor force, which led to a decrease in New York City's production of women and children's apparel from forty-two to sixteen percent between 1947 and 1982 (Whalen 55). Paralleling this decline, and although Puerto Rican workers in the manufacturing sector on the island generally received better salaries, experienced better working conditions and had a higher rate of unionization than those in other Caribbean countries leading up to the 1990s, employment in the garment industry dropped by twenty-six percent between 1976 and 1986 (Icken Safa 224). As both Carmen Teresa Whalen and Margaret M. Chin describe in relation to

the garment industry, by the end of the twentieth century, it was a less-unionized, less-formalized, increasingly precarious and more underground industry that Dominicans encountered after Puerto Ricans no longer dominated the garment-work labor force. As with all industries under neoliberalism, the garment industry increasingly relied on ever cheaper labor, cost-effective and efficient supply chain structures and the locations that could provide these resources. These entrenched histories connecting Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, through a transnational relationship with the U.S., to the global garment industry underscore why the salient presence of textile in the performances under analysis here is unsurprising.

In all four works, this kind of labor—whether it is literalized in actions in the performance or symbolically evoked—highlights the body as the ultimate scene where neoliberalism’s quest for unbridled efficiency is played out in a “bio-, necro-, and antipolitical” way both within the global regime of neoliberal logic and within a regional history of neoliberalism that has its own colonial connotations related to the Atlantic slave trade. For example, in *La ciudadana*, the often-overlooked violent connotation of garment industry labor is highlighted as the camera zooms in on scissors slicing through fabric and a pin pricking a thumb, centering the way that this kind of labor exploits workers at a bodily level. Or in *Siboney*, the historical layers of violently exploited and racialized labor is highlighted as Joiri Minaya’s full body effort in both the creation and destruction of a tropical print is centered.

On the one hand, the association between garment industry labor and the body calls to mind the more sensational examples of laboring bodies working in maquilas and susceptible to the gendered and spectacularized violence of femicide or sweat shop tragedies like the New York Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 and the 2013 Dhaka garment factory collapse in Bangladesh. On the other, the evocation of the garment industry labor in these works highlights a

much more mundane reality of sweatshops labor characterized by what Alessandra Mezzadri has called “the depletion of the laboring body” (176). With this phrase, she draws attention to the everyday physical impact of garment industry labor on the laboring body that includes, but is not limited to, the respiratory health hazards related to cloth particles, the stress of quotas, chronic fatigue, compromised eyesight and the early expulsion of laborers who are still young but whose working potential, due to the aforementioned liabilities to their health, is depleted (182-184). In this way, to evoke garment industry labor is to evoke the specific colonial and neocolonial histories of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and also to highlight a general characteristic of the global economy within which, echoing Silvia Federici, “...*the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism*” (146). Furthermore, in a Caribbean context, it is to acknowledge the way that the neoliberal economic regime can be understood as what Christopher Taylor has described as an “intensification of a plantation mode of exploitation” (5). Drawing on Ian Baucom’s assertion that the history of capitalism is an accumulation rather than a linear progression, Taylor argues that contemporary capitalism can be understood as only the most recent iteration of capitalism—after the plantation and the Fordist factory—that depends on the absolute social control of the worker and his or her productivity to the extent that all leisure time disappears (8). If for Baucom, post-plantation capitalism is a site where “an older deep-structural form inscribes, reasserts, and finds itself realized” (30), garment industry labor in the works considered here becomes a useful nexus for the consideration of these intersections between both global and regional histories of capitalism.

These exploitative conditions related to the both the global garment industry in general and the specific histories of the industry in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are further

exacerbated by the supply chain structure described in relation to logistics due to the way that this structure breaks down any sense of responsibility that one link might feel for another. The 2007 documentary *Made in L.A.*, which follows three workers from a sweatshop in Los Angeles provides a helpful window into how this ethical distancing happens. In the documentary, Lupe, Maura and María all work under exploitative conditions in a Los Angeles garment factory that produces clothing for Forever 21. The film itself follows their organizing and activist journeys as they seek to hold the company responsible for these poor working conditions through a lawsuit; however, for the purposes of my argument here, what is most relevant is the way that Forever 21 absolves itself from responsibility for these conditions. Due to where it is situated in comparison to the workers along the neoliberal supply chain, the company argues that they are not responsible for the working conditions faced by workers like the three featured women because they do not directly employ them. Instead, they are employed by a subcontractor of a supplier that is in turn contracted by the multinational company. Forever 21, at the top of this chain, was responsible for communicating prices for their products that contractors had to accommodate by keeping expenses—including worker wages—low. While the workers of the particular case highlighted in the documentary ended up settling the case in 2004, this settlement included no admission of wrongdoing, and this convoluted structure by which Forever 21 sought to absolve itself from responsibility continues to be a common one. Candice Amich has aptly described the way that neoliberalism “strips its subjects of collective agency, substituting the abstract language of individual freedom for material benefits that sustain life” (3), and it is this breaking down of a sense of collectivity and connectedness that breaks down along this supply chain. The close relationship between labor and object that is found on one end of the supply chain becomes

diffused through the object's journey as it passes through several mediating steps before reaching both a storefront and the consumer that finds it there.

In this way, the precariousness of laborers on one end of the supply chain becomes disconnected from the everyday lives of those on the other, and a hierarchy is held in place where some laboring bodies are invisibilized. In turn, this unequal distribution of vulnerability, which translates in the case of the garment industry to the expendability described above, becomes a natural and accepted consequence of the global economy. It is the case that, as Judith Butler explains in her theorization of precariousness, "Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (*Precarious* 32). Certain lives, and in this case the labor of certain hands, are someone else's responsibility somewhere, but it does not rise to the level of generalized social support and awareness that Butler is getting at in this articulation of grievability. Additionally, if my chapter about solo performance focuses on works that propose ways of being together in relation that are founded in experiences of migration and displacement, this chapter looks at the other side of this characteristic of neoliberalism. As much as neoliberalism is grounded in patterns of displacement and dispossession, it also, as Mimi Sheller points out, depends on the fixing in place of some while it enables the mobility of a privileged few ("Consuming" 201). The logic of logistics and the supply chain dynamics that it perpetuates, undergirded by the historical structure of the plantation, results in this immobilization of workers whose existence is invisibilized and, therefore, ungrievable in their perceived distance from those that benefit from their labor.

Toward an erotic ethics

With this in mind, I argue that the four works under consideration here, by Teatro Pregones, *Self Portrait Factory*, *Chiqui Vicioso* and *Joiri Minaya*, are all, to some extent, an invitation to consider this ethical dilemma of ungrievability in the context of the garment industry. They draw on the affective and multi-sensorial experience evoked through the presence of textile onstage as a way of connecting spectators with the traces of the vulnerable others carried in the folds and texture of these material objects. In so doing, they disrupt the arrangement of laboring bodies that has been entrenched and naturalized as a result of neoliberalism as they foreground the way that the cloth that touches our bodies always already connects us closely to others that are made to feel far away as a result of contemporary supply chain dynamics. This occurs as each work proposes what I call an “erotic ethics,” which can be understood as a kind of ethics that appeals to the audience in a multi-sensorial way to unsettle and disrupt entrenched global hierarchies of labor and the resulting global distribution of precariousness by emphasizing often ignored forms of embodied connections with others. In *La otra orilla* by Teatro Pregones, this is seen in the way that cloth and clothing play a significant role in the overall ethical proposal of the play, which centers around inviting the audience to see and hear the plight of the characters, who are immigrants traveling by raft. In *La ciudadana* by *Self Portrait Factory*, the sensory role of cloth works to weave together Lolita Lebrón’s connection to the garment industry and the Puerto Rican nationalist movement of the 1950s to highlight the way that one is inextricably linked to the other. In *Wish-ky Sour (Trago Amargo)*, the construction of a dress onstage links the interrogation of Dominican feminine identity onstage with the looming context of the Dominican women’s work and lack of worth within the garment industry. And, in *Joiri Minaya*’s installation work *Siboney*, the simultaneous presence of

the creation of the kind of tropical print that you would typically find on a shirt and the destruction of this same print in an action that involves the performer's whole body draws attention both to garment industry labor and to the disruptive potential of this body within the industry.

With these dynamics in mind, the concept of "erotic ethics" draws together a Levinasian concept of ethics in a theatrical setting with Mimi Sheller's use of the concept of the erotic and an aesthetics based in textile to evoke touch and contact between bodies. Levinas' ethics is based in an initial unknowable encounter between self and a vulnerable other that is in turn the basis for subject formation from the very beginning and implicates a "me," from this irrecoverable beginning point, in a relation of responsibility with an "other." Levinas' philosophy of subject formation and ethics involves foregrounding how others have impacted me in ways that I will never be able to know or understand, grounding ethics in a shared sense of vulnerability due to this sense of an irrecoverable origin. Drawing on this relationship between self and other, in the context of theater and performance, a Levinasian sense of ethics finds its basis in a view of the stage/audience relationship as an encounter between spectators and stage that parallels this pre-ontological encounter between self and other and becomes expressed through an intertwining of aesthetics and ethics in the formal aspects of production.⁵⁹ A number of scholars working at this intersection of ethics and theater highlight how a performance space is uniquely suited to representing mirroring the ethical relationship described above.⁶⁰ In fact, this marks a growing

⁵⁹ For an introduction to these Levinasian theoretical concepts, see the essays in the anthology Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings.

⁶⁰ Theater practitioner Hans Thies-Lehmann, whose concept of "response-ability" is intended to highlight a characteristic of contemporary theater where aesthetic choices are made that are also ethical ones as they invite spectators to reevaluate their perception of staged content (185-186), along with scholars such as Nicholas Ridout, Katharina Pewny and Candice Amich all note this as a global contemporary theater trend.

trend in global theater and performance that sees the space of performance as a space of ethical encounter that merges aesthetics with ethics as the formal choices of a given production position the spectator in confrontation with an ethical dilemma that opens them to the other onstage, shifting how spectators might perceive their responsibility and connection to this other. This understanding of theater shifts the immediate relationship between theater and politics away from one following Rancière where aesthetics are seen as politics to one where an ethical dilemma is posed to the audience through various aesthetic choices that in turn facilitate a shift in perception that might become a grounds for political action.⁶¹ With this formulation of ethics as its basis, the “erotic ethics” proposed in the works considered here captures both the fragility and the potential of theater as a space from which political action might—or might not—arise.

Like Mimi Sheller’s “erotic agency,” which draws heavily on Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic as a non-western and embodied foundation for empowerment and which emphasizes subaltern practices of freedom that challenge conventional forms of political agency, an “erotic ethics” is a proposition “from below” in the sense that it originates with subaltern or invisibilized subjects as well as emphasizing often ignored forms of embodied connections with others. These embodied connections are the ones always already present in but often underacknowledged in the textiles we interact with every day. In their edited volume *The Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism in Textile*, Alec Kettle and Lesley Millar highlight the way a discarded item of clothing has a latent erotic connotation, saying: “The cloth becomes my absent body and/or the absent body of the Other—a co-mingling of both” (18). In her essay in this volume, Solveigh Goett further emphasizes the way that textile suggests other forms of co-mingling:

⁶¹ See Chapter 2 of Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics* for a more detailed explanation of the immediate connection he sees between what is made “sensible” by aesthetics and politics.

“...The connectivity between body and object – textiles as physical manifestations of connectedness: the tears of pain and happiness, the sweat of anxiety and excitement both part of the self and absorbed by the cloth, perception and affection, inside and out, body and object interwoven in memory. Folds, entanglements and creases, comfort and restraint, interwoven strands, loose ends, unravelling threads, seams and knots, wear and tear, invention and imagination, magic and symbolism, are all embedded in the fabrics of our life.” (123)

As the work of Kettle and Millar and Goett highlights, textile is inextricable from thought about connection, entanglement, interweaving, and embeddedness. Moreover, fabric as an object has already passed through its own process of threads encountering threads, woven together to make a whole with a past inextricable from these previous moments of encounter and is always suggestive of previous contact with a body.

It this sense of before-ness—of previous encounter—that also makes this aesthetic dimension of cloth simultaneously an ethical one. Eve Sedgwick’s exploration of “textural perception”—considering that textile is always textured material—provides a good articulation of how these aesthetic and ethical dimensions of textile are joined when she argues:

“...To perceive texture is to know or hypothesize whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack, to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak. Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object.” (Sedgwick 13)

In other words, the texture of an object like cloth not only always implies an act of touch but also implicates an other that has already been in contact with the object before. And while Sedgwick’s concept reveals the way that touch in and of itself does not always carry a positive connotation—a grasp, a shred, and even a blow are all forms of touch after all—“erotic ethics” center around a non-grasping and caressing kind of touch. It accepts as part of its premise Ahmed’s interpretation of Levinas’ theory of touch which is “a form of encounter that does not

grasp” (*Strange Encounters* 258) and that is “about finding a better way of encountering the other which allows the other to live, as that which is beyond ‘my’ grasp...” (*Strange Encounters* 139). I argue that the works under consideration here embrace an aesthetics grounded in this recovered sense of connectivity that is imagined via this kind of encounter.

The “erotic ethics” proposed by the four works considered here foreground the haptic nature of textile—a material that we engage with every day and that situates us within the context of the global garment industry—as an aesthetic feature that doubles as an ethical one in the Levinasian sense described above. They draw on what Laura Marks has called a “haptic visuality” by activating other senses beyond the sense of sight which in turn emphasizes a close relationship between viewer and work on a bodily level (2-3). The works show how textile, as a textured object, connects spectators to implied laboring others that have already touched and worked on the objects onstage previous to the encounter. Moreover, as they activate the immediate connection between the presence of cloth and our sense of touch, they prompt audiences to consider the way the feel of the textile onstage extends to the cloth—and clothes—they touch every day. And they do this within a larger context of neoliberalism in a way that disrupts the economic system that holds bodies at a distance and within a specific hierarchy that determines differential levels of vulnerability, visibility and care. Through the presence of textile, the works propose an “erotic ethics” that invites spectators to reconsider their connection and responsibility to a global hierarchy of labor that is freshly palpable as they focus on shifting the sensorial experience that audiences are used to having in the face of these objects due to both the particular sensory experience and distance imposed by a neoliberal logic of logistics. In the following four sections, I will analyze each of the works considered in this chapter in relation to emphasis on ethical encounter with the other as accentuated by the

activation of a sense of touch via the presence of cloth onstage before concluding with a discussion of how all of these works in dialogue theorize the kind of “erotic ethics” that I describe here.

La ciudadana

The 2014 film short *La ciudadana* was created by the Self Portrait Factory, a Puerto Rican group that leads storytelling-through-film workshops around the globe. According to their website, they “offer an intensive and comprehensive film workshop where each participant embarks on a journey of self-exploration through the use of different mediums such as writing, drawing and video in order to discover their creative voice and share it with the world” (*Self Portrait Factory*). Along with *La ciudadana*, the group’s Vimeo page includes uploaded video projects from a variety of locations from Puerto Rico and Cuba to Germany and Algeria (“Self Portrait Factory”). Llaima Sanfiorenzo is the founder of the group and the director of *La ciudadana*, which, unlike many other films in the project, which favor a more straightforward documentary approach, draws instead on the reenactment genre and also relies heavily on performance art to tell the story of Lolita Lebrón in the larger context of Puerto Rican feminine labor and feminist activism in the garment industry. The unmistakable connection to Puerto Rico’s popular theater tradition is unsurprising given the network of artists involved in the project. Along with Llaima Sanfiorenzo’s participation as director, Eyerí Crúz’s participation as co-screenwriter and Yari Helfeld’s participation as the principal actress connect the project to both older and more recent iterations of the tradition. Yari Helfeld and her sister Nami Helfeld, who attended the Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba along with Sanfiorenzo and Eyerí Crúz (CyberNews), are two of the co-founders of the Puerto Rican theater group Y No Había Luz mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Y No Había Luz

was founded in 2005 and since then has developed an extensive repertoire of original theatrical pieces, produced several film shorts, and facilitated art and theater workshops focused on celebrating Puerto Rican culture, educational events, and politically oriented work (Rivera Cedeño; *Y No Había Luz*). The group itself exists in a much longer genealogy of popular and political theater on the island that began with groups such El Tajo del Alacrán and Anamú in the sixties and seventies and continued through Anamú alumna Rosa Luisa Márquez in Los Teatros Ambulantes de Cayey in the eighties (Gómez Aponte 117-120, 198-214). Both Yari Helfeld and Eyerí Cruz have also participated in projects led by Rosa Luisa Márquez (“Historias para ser contadas (2001);” *Y No Había Luz*).⁶²

An intersection of the film and performance genealogy described above, *La ciudadana* is a good starting point for an analysis that seeks to highlight a relationship between textile, garment industry labor and touch. In the film, the actress Yari Helfeld, led by Sanfiorenzo and the rest of the production team, embodies the story of Lolita Lebrón’s participation in the infamous act of insurgency at the U.S. Congress in 1954. Helfeld plays a nameless woman, who slowly transforms into Lebrón over the course of the film, has minimal dialog until the end and instead communicates her connection with the historical figure through a series of jump cuts that

⁶² El Tajo de Alacrán was established in 1966 with the goal of serving marginalized and exploited Puerto Ricans as well as educating audiences about politics (Gómez Aponte 117). Anamú was a group that emerged in 1972 out of a student group at the University of Puerto Rico and was characterized by being involved in politics and activism, embracing collective creation, and addressing social issues affecting the lives of Puerto Ricans (Vásquez 15). The context described in this paragraph is limited to show the way that participants in the *La ciudadana* project are specifically connected to this popular and political theater tradition in Puerto Rico, but this tradition is much vaster than what is encompassed here. To name some more examples that give a better picture of this extent of this popular and political influence in Puerto Rican island-based theater, other groups that emerged alongside Anamú in the seventies include Moriviví and el Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América (Gómez Aponte 121). Another Anamú alumna, Maritza Pérez Otero, among other educational activities, has led seminar-style street theater course for youth since the nineties called Teatro en Movimiento and also leads the group Jóvenes del 98 (“Maritza Pérez Otero;” Jóvenes del ‘98). Maritza Pérez Otero continues to work with these projects as well as others on the island alongside other more contemporary groups such as Agua, Sol y Sereno, another group that emerged in the nineties (*Teatro puertorriqueño reimaginado* Fiet 331-338; Gómez Aponte 256-265), and the more recently founded and aforementioned Y No Había Luz.

remain connected in their emphasis on the tactile and erotic process of recreating the suit that Lebrón wore during that day at the Capitol, which was thoroughly photographed and featured in the media after the event. The first seven minutes of the almost fourteen-minute film take place in a white room with a concrete floor that is empty but for a sewing table, vintage sewing machine, material, pattern pieces, sewing supplies, and a white, podium-shaped box that Helfeld slowly and laboriously drags into the frame. Throughout this first seven minutes, Helfeld intermittently works on constructing a garment and dances with her own shadow which, due to frontlighting, lingers on the background wall throughout this part of the film. This shadow seems to pull her; she cannot help but be drawn to it, her body pressing against the wall. In the second half, before ending with a washed out shot of Lebrón dancing in a room that stands in for the prison cell where Lebrón spent the 25 years after her act of insurgency at the Capitol, the film shows Helfeld fully dressed as Lebrón, wearing her signature lipstick, and speaking in front of a mugshot backdrop next to an actor who plays Cancel Miranda, one of the other participants. The voices of actors fade in and out, alternating with voices from footage of the press conference that took place after the shooting. Meanwhile, ghostly footage from the press conference is fleetingly imposed over the actors in the film as the actors embody this moment. The shooting itself is not dramatized, but it is recreated for viewers through the use of actual news reports from 1954 playing over a series of sketched images of the events that took place in Congress—the shots directed toward the ceiling, the chaos in the House chamber, and the injured Congressmen.⁶³

⁶³ On March 1, 1954, a date chosen, according to Lebrón, because it was opening day of the Inter-American Conference in Caracas, Venezuela where the Nationalist Party was to argue in favor of Puerto Rican Independence, Lebrón led Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andrés Figueroa Cordero and Irvin Flores Rodríguez into the House Gallery at the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. From this gallery, they began shooting toward the ceiling, aiming, as Lebrón says, to die for their cause rather than to kill anyone in the building. Upon arrest, she is quoted as stating as such: “Yo no vine a matar. Yo vine a morir” (Ruiz 35). In the rain of bullets, five Congressmen were wounded before a combination of Capitol guards, Congressmen and visitors tackled and disarmed the group. Three of them, including Lebrón, were taken to police headquarters while Flores Rodríguez escaped. (Jiménez de Wagenheim 256-259).

While the film seems to diverge from the Self Portrait Factory's mission focused on developing autobiographical stories told through film, the different ways that Helfeld is drawn into an embodiment of Lebrón—through the drag of the shadow, the creating and wearing of the suit and the lip sinking to voiceovers of real-life footage of Lebrón—mark the film as an individual's exploration of the importance of the nationalist and feminist historical figure that is Lolita Lebrón. In the second part of the film, the entrancing pull of Helfeld's isolated solo performance is lost, so my current analysis focuses on the aesthetic—and by extension ethical—work being accomplished through this initial performance.

First, the fact that the film—via Helfeld's performance—grounds Lebrón's story in her work as a seamstress is significant in the context of the varied and sensationalized understandings of her life that circulate both within Puerto Rico history specifically and in U.S. history more generally. In her memoir, Lebrón's granddaughter Irene Vilar comments about the time after her release from prison, saying:

On the street the people come up to touch her: they kiss her hand, ask for something of her as a relic. Others curse her or look at her in silence. The left doesn't understand her, or fears her (they fear the religious Lolita). The right rejects her (we already know why); the center, will, the center has no opinion. Only intellectuals and artists seek her out, some of them devouring her with their obsequious homages and diplomas. (Vilar 288-289)

Her contradictory identity as devout Catholic, religious icon, nationalist revolutionary, inconsequential political radical and intellectual darling chafes against easy categorization. In *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance*, Sandra Ruiz further captures the complexity of Lebrón's public identity by reviewing a long history of scholarship, journalism and public mythology that simultaneously and incompatibly hold her as a teen pageant queen, a red-lipstick-wearing sexual fantasy, the ultimate femme fatale, a devout Catholic, a nation's mother figure, an inadequate mother who abandoned her children, a mad, suicidal and hysterical

woman of color, a socialist, a communist, a terrorist, and the list goes on (Ruiz 40-41). In *La ciudadana*, though, it is ultimately her connection with garment industry labor that seems to ground her identity, making some sense of—if not completely resolving—many of these contradictions.

Lebrón’s connection with garment work has a long history that begins during the Great Depression as her father, in spite of economic hardship, managed to send her to study fashion in San Juan (Jiménez de Wagenheim 244). Many years later in 1940, with a child to support she left for New York City, found work within the garment industry there, but had a hard time keeping a job because the horrible working conditions, in her own words, “provoked my rebellious nature” (Lebrón in Jiménez de Wagenheim 245). According to her own accounts, a combination of frustration with poor working conditions and general poverty encountered by Puerto Ricans, as well as religious conviction, motivated her involvement in the Nationalist Party (Jiménez de Wagenheim 248-249). Much later, during her time in prison after her participation in the 1954 act of insurgency,⁶⁴ her connection to garment industry labor specifically came full circle as she was sent to work in the sewing room, where she would sew clothing for women who were about to be released as well as curtains and other items for use in the prison itself (Jiménez de Wagenheim 267-268). An appreciation for fashion that undoubtedly motivated her meticulous

⁶⁴ While this event is commonly known as the 1954 “shooting” or “attack” on Congress, I follow Sandra Ruiz in my framing of this event as an act of insurgency in order to highlight the power dynamics at play in both the motivation for the event itself and what happened in the aftermath. I also do this to intentionally highlight a distinction between this event and the insurrection on January 6, 2021, which was an attack on the U.S. Capitol with the express intent to harm those working inside and to undermine the fair results of a democratic election whose results left those participating in the insurrection disgruntled. The insurgent act in 1954 carried out by Lebrón and her compatriots was the culmination of years of cultural and economic devastation on the island of Puerto Rico that were the direct result of U.S. colonization of the island. Lebrón’s own involvement with the Nationalist Party stemmed from her frustration with the exploitative and humiliating conditions that she discovered herself—and other Puerto Rican women—working and living under upon her arrival to New York (Ruiz 43). It is worth noting that, in contrast to the larger scale incursion that occurred in 2021, the smaller scale action committed by Lebrón was met with immediate formal charges of “sedition, assault with a deadly weapon, and intent to kill” (Ruiz 36). While some of these charges were dropped, Lebrón was sentenced to fifteen to fifty-six years in prison for the crime of which she served twenty-five years before her sentence was commuted.

femme self-styling later in life and, more specifically, during her planned insurgency, became inseparable from her experience of the gendered, racialized and colonial dynamics of garment industry labor.

Throughout the first seven minutes of *La ciudadana*, both the presence of and the film's continuous closeups of the sewing process by which Lebrón created her dress suit are aesthetic choices that invite a sense of closeness between potential viewers, the actress on stage, and, by extension, a carefully crafted version of Lebrón herself. As Helfeld laboriously pulls a large white podium-looking box into the frame, a silky, vintage, off-white slip flutters with each move, caressing the curves of her body. The movement of this slip and the way that it hangs on Helfeld's body provides an initial moment of appeal to the viewing audience's sense of touch. While the voiceover during this scene is a clip of Lebrón during a 1997 television appearance in which she continues to claim full responsibility for the 1954 act of insurgency saying explicitly, "Soy...la que...dirigió el ataque al Congreso de Estados Unidos de Norteamérica..." the foregrounding of cloth against body seems to propose an embodied rather than intellectually political connection to her message. This focus on the sewing process continues to highlight connection at the level of the body as the camera zooms in first, for example, jumping to a close up of a bleeding pinprick on Helfeld's left thumb. She uses her right hand to squeeze out the blood and the camera jumps to a close up of her working with the fabric, her bloody thumb leaving a mark on the taupe-colored, satiny fabric. This pinprick, whose squeezing draws out the impact of the small injury therefore prompting the audience to imagine how it feels rather than looking past it, turns into a stain on the finished product that seems to evoke the larger context of violence and exploitation of bodies that perform this kind of labor that often might be perceived as benign and domestic in nature. Later, a close up of Helfeld's foot as she pumps the sewing

machine pedal further emphasizes the intense labor inherent in this process right before the camera jumps to the finished product—a replica of the jacket that Lebrón wore in 1954. The woman disconnects the jacket from the machine, cutting the thread, and puts on the jacket. We then see the woman as her body rubs against the back wall, finally pulling away from her shadow and moving to position herself square with the camera. In this final pose, Helfeld seems to invite the viewing audience to further contemplate the labor—and by extension the laboring hands—that have previously touched this infamous jacket. In line with Marks' concept of "haptic visuality," Helfeld's performance connects with viewers as it uses the camera's emphasis on the relationship between body and cloth to "encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image" (3). Furthermore, the underscoring of a latent violence in the garment construction process—here shown in a pin prick, a metallic and knife-like pair of scissors, and the effort the Helfeld's body shows during the sewing process—connects garments with the garment industry, specifically inviting the audience into an encounter with Lebrón as a laborer.

Both the soundscape of the film and the use of shadows further contribute to the multi-sensorial experience of this work as they seem to signal through hyper-realism and symbolism that situates Lebrón in connection with a history outside of the single event highlighted in this film. Certain sounds throughout the film are exaggerated in a way that both enhances the touch-based aesthetic described in the previous paragraph and seems to put the audience in touch with something beyond the confines of the film's narrative. In the very first scene, the volume of the rub of Helfeld's dragging feet that move across the concrete floor is heightened so that, like in the pinprick moment, the contact between surfaces is foregrounded for the audience. The sonorous and the tactile work together to facilitate an encounter between the audience and the body in performance. Later, as a closeup shows Helfeld's hands using the vintage-looking, sharp,

steel scissors to cut around a pattern piece, the sound of the scissors is enhanced, which, as aforementioned, has the effect of further emphasizing the possible violence inherent in the labor of constructing a garment. Finally, throughout the film, the volume of Helfeld's breathe is amplified in a way that further draws the audience's attention to the body at the center of the performance on the screen. All of these hyper-realistic sound elements combine to create a soundscape that feels both connected to and beyond the body on the screen, and it is this sense of beyondness that the shadows also intensify. As I mentioned above, throughout the film, Helfeld as Lebrón struggles in different moments to detach herself from the shadow that, due to a front lighting technique, appears on the wall behind her. While she seemingly manages to win the battle with her shadow in the moment where she poses in the jacket as also described above, this shadow lingers behind her, a haunting reference to something before and beyond—in a Levinasian sense—the body of the performer as Lebrón. These other visual and aural characteristics of the film's aesthetic combine with touch to compound the on-film traces that further connect the audience to multiple others that have preceded Lolita Lebrón and her activism.

Between the representation of garment industry labor in the performance and the presence in this portion of the film of vintage sewing equipment and the podium, the body in the performance connects audiences to Lebrón as a laborer while also seeming to invite them into an encounter with others whose work as laborers and activists in this industry came before Lebrón's own work. The magnification of the laboring process via the multi-sensorial emphasis placed on the sewing process throughout the film simultaneously signals Helfeld's embodied encounter with Lebrón as activist, the audience's embodied encounter with Lebrón via Helfeld's performance of her labor, and the audience's connection via Helfeld's performance and Lebrón's

contextualization as a laborer within the larger history of Puerto Rican womens' experiences within the garment industry. Moreover, situating a podium within this space seems to not only reference Lebrón's own future behind podiums at press conferences and other events but also seems to hint at the many metaphorical podiums behind which other female Puerto Rican labor activists have stood. While the garment industry did not see as much female labor activism as the cigar industry did even in the early 1900s due in large part to the way that much of sewing work took place in domestic spaces rather than factories, the initiation of Puerto Rican women into the garment industry happened concurrently with their participation in labor organizing and activism. Specific to the garment industry, there were the strikes that were organized in opposition to poor wages and conditions at María Luisa Arcelay's garment workshop in the 1930s which were met with brutal violence (Radost 53-54). The presence of the podium throughout the beginning of *La ciudadana* also brings to mind the educational, organizing and theoretical work done by feminist activist Luisa Capetillo during this same time period (Rangelova 54). While centered around the cigar industry, it seems especially relevant that part of Capetillo's own activism had to do explicitly with her own self-styling as a woman who was imprisoned for wearing trousers (Romero-Cesareo 778).

In this sense, while interpretations of Lolita Lebrón's role in Puerto Rican history are diverse and contradictory, Helfeld's performance as part of the *La ciudadana* production situates Lebrón's work specifically within a genealogy of laborers and activists connected to feminine labor both on the island and on the mainland. In her book *Gendered Geographies in Puerto Rican Culture: Spaces, Sexualities, Solidarities*, Rangelova Radost discusses a trend in Puerto Rican film that uses the space of the factory to insert "women's work in Puerto Rican national history, positioning it as an integral part of the nation-building process" (70). With a title like *La*

ciudadana, this film seems to reference this tradition while also pushing at its limitations by inscribing Lebrón's work as a radical activist within this same national history. Via an aesthetics that appeals to multiple senses and that grounds the narrative surrounding the 1954 act of insurgency at the U.S. Capitol, as well as the narrative of Lebrón's involvement in it, within the larger context of Puerto Rican women's historical involvement within the garment industry, the film invites the audience to consider the ethical dilemma of Lebrón's actions as connected to the ethical dilemma of an exploitative industry. Through the layering of sound and imagery on top of the tactile presence of textile featured throughout the film, the audience is invited to consider a new kind of always-already historicized connection to the physical connection with that touches us in everyday life.

La otra orilla

The New York Puerto Rican group Teatro Pregones' play *La otra orilla* premiered in 1996 at the Teatro de Repertorio del Centro de Arte y Cultura Hostos in the Bronx. It is based on the play *Obra póstuma* by Andalusian playwright Eusebio Colange, which, according to both the Hemispheric Institute's video archive and Eva C. Vázquez's book-length study of Teatro Pregones' work, he wrote in response to the raft migration crisis of the 1990s ("La otra orilla;" Vázquez 78). While *Obra póstuma* is more symbolic in nature and follows the story of three characters that appear in stage on gurneys and, over the course of the play, come to wonder if they might be dead (Calonge), *La otra orilla* transforms the original work into one that is clearly set in a Caribbean context with visual and aural cues that evoke the ocean, Yoruba culture, the space of a raft, Puerto Rican-specific humor and live Caribbean-style music. In this way, it is firmly within the popular theater tradition of the other works in Teatro Pregones' repertoire. In the context of the mainland United States, Teatro Pregones was working within the same

politically committed tradition as groups from the sixties such as, for example, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet Theatre, El Teatro Campesino, the Free Southern Theatre and the Black Arts Repertory Theatre (Vásquez 27). Several Puerto Rican groups focusing on the social and political challenges of Puerto Ricans in the mainland United States also emerged during the sixties and seventies, including Miriam Colón's Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Pedro Santaliz's Teatro Pobre De América, Soledad Romero's Teatro de Orilla and the community-based Teatro Cuatro (Vásquez 27-38). With these groups, along with the aforementioned island-based popular theater tradition as a major influence, Teatro Pregones was founded in 1979 with the main goal of producing Puerto Rican theater in Spanish (Vásquez 39). By the nineties when *La otra orilla* debuted, Teatro Pregones' original mission had expanded to include "presenting and adapting plays, poetry, and narratives pertinent to those issues affecting the Latinx community in general and the Puerto Rican community in particular" (Vásquez 40).

As noted above, garment industry labor has been a kind of labor long-associated with the history of Puerto Rican migration to the mainland U.S., and although the play itself strikes a more universal tone as it follows the ocean journey of two nameless individuals who are traveling by raft and could be from any given country around the globe from which emigrants leave via perilous water travel, two moments from the play stand out in connection to this more specific Puerto Rican history. First, before the action begins, a wide-angled spotlight that is mottled with white and blue to suggest waves lights the stage where a long, white length of fabric hangs from the ceiling, billowing straight down all the way to the floor toward the front of a slightly raised and square platform that demarcates space in the middle of the black box theater that could be a raft but also suggests a rooftop due to the additional presence of three boxes that evoke raised skylights. If you have been prepared by promotional materials to understand that

the play is about migration by water between the Caribbean and the U.S.,⁶⁵ the billow of cloth might make you think of a boat's sail. In hindsight, as the question of whether the characters are still alive or not comes up, one might think of it in connection to a funeral shroud. Rivera's initial slow and methodical action of pulling the white cloth from the hook and allowing it to flutter to the ground in a heap gives spectators ample time to contemplate the significance of the object. Making her way across the upstage area, she gathers the white cloth fold by fold into a pile in her arms before leaving it next to the box in the upstage left area, activating, to use Sedgwick's term referenced above, the audience's textural perception and adding the sense of touch to the multisensorial experience of the play.

As the other characters enter, Rivera settles onto the box, picks up the pile of cloth, and begins to perform the act of sewing in the background of the action that unfolds on the raft throughout the play. Her presence as a seamstress—not to mention her vintage black dress—seem to further connect to decades of Puerto Rican women that sat and worked at home on “piece work” both on the island and in New York at early mid-century when this garment industry was booming and Puerto Rican women were seen as ideal candidates due to, as described above, their noted industriousness and willingness to work for exploitative wages (Whalen 47-48). This reference extends back to the 1920s in Puerto Rico when the Supreme Court on the island upheld minimum salary protections for workshops and factories while excluding domestic workers from such protections and rendered such workers invisible and difficult to track in terms of numbers (González García 75-79).⁶⁶ It also evokes the equally

⁶⁵ For example, On the page at the Hemispheric Institute where I viewed the video of this play, the synopsis states: “It is inspired in the tragedy of many lives lost in the Caribbean waters...Thousands of Puerto Ricans have left Puerto Rico over the years, many others have gone back...”

⁶⁶ In her book *Una puntada en el tiempo La industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico (1900-1929)*, Lydia Milagros González García describes how this decision by the court led to an explosion in women working from home within the the garment industry. She notes: “La cifra de la existencia de 35,000 trabajadoras a domicilio que nos da ese

exploitative conditions that Puerto Rican garment industry workers found in mid-century New York as referenced in relation to Lolita Lebrón's biography above. The presence of Rivera's character serves as a connecting thread between the migration experience being performed by the other characters onstage and the long history of labor exploitation to which this migration is connected. Furthermore, her manipulation of the length of textile which is displayed prominently at the beginning of the play and remains present in the background throughout the play contributes to the activation of spectators' textural perception, inviting them to connect with this migrating and laboring other represented on the stage.

Rivera's character also satirically embodies elements of the blind prophet and seer Tiresias as she dons sunglasses on the dim stage and, from her seated spot in the upstage left space throughout the whole play, makes intermittent proclamations that are humorous in their abstract pithiness rather than weighty and meaningful to the action like the wise proclamations of Tiresias in the Oedipus plays. She simultaneously seems to embody elements of the Yoruban orisha Oya—an Afro-Caribbean deity—as her character seems to control the wind and storms during parts of the play at least partially embodying the orisha Oya whose connection to this kind of weather is coupled with an association with death and rebirth (Ifa Karade 27). On the one hand, the presence of this cloth encapsulates all of these references, drawing metaphors between death, migration to a new and exploitative destination, and the general experience of living as an immigrant or ethnic minority whose identity feels torn in between places. On the other, layered on these more universal meanings, the way the length of textile is handled by Rivera's act of sewing in connection with both this Greek and Yoruban symbolism imbues this cloth with the

mismo informe de 1919, seguirá creciendo para los años sub-siguientes. En el año 1927 'éstas se han elevado a casi 40,000 trabajadoras a domicilio' (75). This trend continues leaving the industry in Puerto Rico based on laborers who were paid extremely low wages, were difficult to track by formal means, and were almost impossible to formally organize.

connotations of the naturalized necropolitical violence of the garment industry. The almost parody of Tiresias' wisdom enhances the fatalistic sense that the natural course this kind of journey is inevitable death, and Oya's association with death and the kind of storm that makes ocean travel of this sort especially dangerous and likely to end in death contribute to this connotation. On the other hand, Oya's connection to death not as an end but as a new beginning hints at a future that might not be contained by this limited socioeconomic reality.

As Rivera works in the background, and within this loose Beckettian plot in which the characters wait for an arrival and for help that never arrives, the two main characters' relationship with cloth and clothing further accentuates the connections to both a long history of migration and the search for labor that has often motivated it. Rosalba Rolón and José Merced play the two main characters who make the journey on the raft represented onstage. They engage in moments of dialogue that are at the very least circular in nature if not completely absurdist in some moments, discussing silence, resignation versus hope, the fact that no one is coming, and other topics related both to a journey and their mental state, which the color of the lighting and the volume, tempo and tone of the music accentuate throughout.⁶⁷ Moments of clear conversation tend to devolve into hallucinatory meditations that mimic not only the experience of being stranded on a raft at sea without food, water, and hope for rescue but also the unsettling experience of arriving as an immigrant to a new and unwelcoming destination. As the play draws to a close, the characters could be dead without knowing it or simply living through the necropolitical element of a global economy that relies on the movement, vulnerability and living death of certain bodies as I describe via Sayek Valencia's theorization of gore capitalism mentioned in

⁶⁷ A piano and other instruments are situated upstage right ready to incorporate live music into the work in true Teatro Pregones style.

the introduction above. In the midst of this action, Rolón's character is dressed in a black skirt suit with a scalloped white lapel, black almond-toe pumps, and a black pillbox hat with a gray gauze piece attached. Merced's character is wearing a dark gray three-piece suit with black oxfords, a maroon scarf, and a gray fedora. In both cases, the costume style has a timeless vintage aesthetic with clear reference to mid-century style.⁶⁸ Near the beginning of the play, during the first storm, the characters become disheveled, both losing their hats, Merced's character losing his scarf, and both with unbuttoned jackets. After the music and frantic onstage action that communicates the effects of the storm come to an end, the two characters carefully and silently recompose themselves, putting clothes back on, adjusting jackets, replacing hats. Merced's character picks up his scarf and sniffs it with a faraway look of happy nostalgia in his eyes. The actions are completed slowly and with great care, drawing the moment out in a way that the audience cannot look past these mundane gestures. The removal and replacing of clothing becomes a major part of the action throughout the rest of the play as it helps to communicate the temperature that the characters are experiencing—a warm white spotlight signifies the sun beating down on them in different moments—as well as the characters' mental state as actions and dialogue repeatedly devolves into a hallucinatory chaos with the actors tugging the outer layers of clothing off of their bodies before recomposing their outfits once more as they prepare to arrive at their destination. The connection between cloth and bodies onstage that is highlighted through these repeated and purposeful gestures calls attention to both a tactile and visual experience.

⁶⁸ The clothes look like they could have been cut from black and white mid-century images included in, for example, the photo collections *Pioneros I: Puerto Ricans in New York City 1896-1948* and *Pioneros II: Puerto Ricans in New York City 1948-1998*.

This emphasis on clothing becomes intertwined with the ethical invitation that is explicitly highlighted in the dialogue itself as the action onstage continually situates spectators in a position of those being asked to listen and see. Around fifteen minutes into the play, a loud ship horn sound indicates the invisible presence of a passing ship. “¡Eh! ¡Estamos aquí!” the two main characters onstage begin to yell, gesticulating wildly at the ship while facing the audience who is thus positioned as the interlocutor of their cries for help. The sound builds to a climax before fizzling out as the characters proclaim, “Es inútil,” and, “Resignación.” This plea articulated as “¡Estamos aquí!” being yelled in a tone of desperation and physically directed toward where the audience is sitting happens in two other moments in the play. In one moment at about the play’s halfway point, the two characters on the raft begin to argue as Merced’s character runs frantically around the raft looking for a way out and Rolón’s character berates him for having any hope that such an escape exists. As they continue their argument, the live music coming from upstage drowns them out with an ominous-sounding number that raises in volume until Merced jumps up onto one of the boxes positioned on the stage, yelling the phrase and waving his hands toward the audience. Toward the end of the play, another exchange that follows this pattern unfolds in the following way, also directed out toward the audience,

Character 1: ¡Han venido!..¿Han venido? ¿Dónde están?

Character 2: ¿Todavía no se ve a nadie?

Character 1: ¿Dónde están?

Character 2: ¡¡Eh!! ¡¡¡Estamos aquí!!!

Character 1: ¿No ves a nadie?

Character 2: No viene nadie.

This situating of the audience in the problematic position of being the ones that choose not to hear and see the plight of the others represented onstage before them is a repeated theme throughout the play. In perhaps the most incisive moment related to this theme, after the two characters have been tossed about by a second storm, Rolón’s character bitterly proclaims, “Es

que no va a venir nadie. Es que no hay nadie aquí. Parece que nadie quiere enterrarse de nada. Aquí todos se hacen los sordos.” Drawing on a sentiment that brings to mind Butler’s previously mentioned ethical dilemma of lives that are discounted as ungrievable, the play works to shift spectators’ focus to the way they are hearing, seeing and perceiving the events that are unfolding on the stage, placing them in an ethical encounter.

The bunching of cloth, the act of sewing, the sniffing of the scarf, the removal and methodical putting-back-on of clothing, and the nostalgic style of the clothing in and of itself—all of these different elements of this performance combine to draw the audience into connecting with the actors and themes explored onstage in a multi-sensorial way. On one level, the elements of this play combine to compose a meditation not only on the dangers and difficulties of making a migration journey by makeshift raft or boat but also on this kind of journey as a metaphor for all migration journeys and the unsettled feeling of being torn between two cultures, of never arriving, and of disappointed hopes due to encountering an inhospitable or even exploitative situation when you reach your destination. On another level, an analysis focusing on the role of cloth and clothing in *La otra orilla* highlights the way that the play draws on an aesthetics based in the tactile to underscore the ethical message communicated in the dialogue. Beyond just seeing and hearing that “¡Estamos aquí!,” the play invites spectators into an ethical encounter in which they are prompted to think about the social, geographical and historical position of the others represented onstage in relation to the positioning of their own bodies as cloth touches and, in so doing, connects with both.

Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)

Dominican playwright Luisa Angélica Sherezada “Chiqui” Vicioso’s play *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)* premiered in 1997 in the Dominican Republic where it won the prestigious

Premio Nacional de Teatro Cristóbal Llerena—a moment in which Vicioso became the first woman to receive this honor (Durán Almarza 92). The play, which is one of her most anthologized works, was first staged by Dominican theater group Teatro Simarrón and has since been staged both in the Dominican Republic and at theater festivals in places such as San José and Miami (Martínez Tabares 26). It has also been staged with a Cuban cast by Cuban director Xiomara Calderón (Martínez Tabares 26). Regarding Vicioso's theatrical work in general, critical attention has often been focused on the gendered and transnational elements of the work due to both characteristics of her biography and her work's thematic content. Not only has Vicioso served in an official capacity as consultant to the UN's program for the development of women, as national head of women's programs for UNICEF and as ambassador for the Dominican Republic's section on Asuntos de la Mujer, Niñez, Adolescencia y Envejecientes, but she also lived in New York for 18 years even spending part of her time working in hat and button factories there (Durán Almarza 92). Years later, and after returning to the island, she became one of the most canonical female playwrights in the Dominican Republic—a country where the presence of female playwrights in the theater scene was rare until the 1990s (Quackenbush 24). This focus on women's issues and on her own migration to the U.S. and back to the Dominican Republic is often highlighted by scholars who analyze her work. For example, Vivian Martínez Tabares emphasizes the way that her plays tend to focus on conflicts related to female characters within the context of migration, intercultural connections in the Caribbean or loneliness (26). Emilia María Durán Almarza explores her openly feminist approach to her written production in general as well as her critical eye toward the migratory and diasporic experience (92-93). Camilla Stevens also discusses in depth the way that she portrays Dominican culture as a transnational practice in her play *Nuyor/Islas* (30). What I am interested in is taking these

analyses a step further and thinking about how these themes of gender and transnationalism converge in an implicit commentary on the neoliberal garment industry in *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*.

Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour) is a dialogue between two actresses that the audience soon comes to realize is really a monologue that is split between two different facets of an aging Dominican woman's identity. As the play begins, Helena 1 is on the stage, seated on a large trunk in what is described as the sewing room of a private home, sewing as she contemplates aloud her perception of what it means to grow older. Interrupting her musings, and after "dolores de parto, mientras cose," as the stage directions indicate, Helena 1 births Helena 2 from out of the trunk where she has been seated and the two Helenas begin their dialogue. Over the course of their conversation, which vacillates between a more serious and a more humorous tone, Helena 2 questions Helena 1's insistence on suppressing her creativity, passions and freedom in the name of duty, sacrifice and acceptable repertoires of femininity. Helena 2 criticizes Helena 1's attitude toward their husband's infidelity with the maid, expresses her disdain for Hollywood's standards of feminine beauty and highlights the irony of Helena 1's discomfort with her own repressed sexuality in contrast with her consumption of alcoholic beverages with names such as "Screaming Orgasm" and "Sex on the Beach." By the end of the play, Helena 2 has not been able to convince Helena 1 to leave what she perceives as the "peace" of her domestic life for a different kind of future, and Helena 2 declares, over Helena 1's desperate pleadings, that she is leaving by herself resulting in a final scene where the tenor of the dialogue suggests Helena's inability to stay alive beyond the tragic split that ends this dialogue. The play opens up many questions related to gendered roles in the Dominican Republic, aging and femininity, the implications of social class for gendered expectations, and even gendered issues with alcoholism

in the Dominican Republic—something to which the “trago amargo” and wordplay with the drink “whisky sour” in the title *Wish-ky Sour / Trago Amargo* clearly allude.⁶⁹ However, what is most interesting for my current analysis is the way that the continual background presence of the set and the action of sewing that takes place onstage situates this play within the context of a contemporary body of Dominican theatrical work that, with the presence of garment-industry-related objects, invites spectators to consider the intersection of feminine Dominican bodies and labor under a neoliberal regime. Going beyond typical interpretations of this play as a meditation on alcoholism among aging Dominican women or as a crisis of feminine identity brought on by old age, I am interested in the way that an understanding of the conflict at the center of the play between the two Helenas might shift slightly as it is reconsidered within the context of the neoliberalization of the Dominican economy—especially through the development of free trade zones—that exploded in the decade previous to the play’s creation. It is the presence of sewing onstage—a connection to garment industry labor—that allows me to adopt this narrow focus for the purposes of my argument here. While the connection with this kind of labor is minimal in this work compared to the others under consideration, its connection to the larger theme of gender and disposability makes it worth exploring in relation to the economic context I describe in this chapter.

It is within the context of a growing neoliberal economy that is based to a large extent on the garment industry, that led to the devaluing and disposability of feminine Dominican labor

⁶⁹ Referencing statistics related to the number of middle and upper class women in the Dominican Republic who struggle with alcoholism, the introductory material for one published version of the play notes, “Una de las tragedias menos conocidas en nuestro país es el alto nivel de alcoholismo entre mujeres de la clase media y alta. . .sobretudo entre el grupo de mujeres que bordea lo que se ha denominado como la tercera edad” (9). And Vivian Martínez Tabares emphasizes that the play “logra articular dimensiones personales y sociales al examinar la crisis existencial de una mujer que, en los albores de ese término impreciso y amenazador al que se le llama ‘tercera edad’ en el clímax de la insatisfacción, se escinde en dos” (27).

within this industry and that exists in conjunction with a social structure that further limits the possibilities for what femininity should look like in the Dominican Republic that *Trago Amargo* (*Wish-ky Sour*) takes on new meaning. As mentioned in the introduction, in the nineties, the decade during which this play premiered, free trade zones, an accompanying feminization of labor in these zones—as well as the prevalence of garment industry operations in these zones—was becoming a norm. This followed a global trend of free trade zone operations marked by “usable, expendable, abusable, and ultimately, disposable” (Young 9) female labor. Due to this context and to Vicioso’s own experiences working within the transnational garment industry, it seems fair to say that the set of the play establishes theatrical space not only as gendered and domestic but also as one of a kind of labor that evokes a connection to the garment industry. In her introductory notes about the first staging of the play, Vicioso explains that it takes place in a “salón de costura donde una mujer trata de armar, o coser, los pedazos de su vida (representada en un vestido que usa al final para retener a su contraria)” (92). While there is little archival material related to the play and few stage directions to suggest how the act of sewing this dress is incorporated throughout, it is clear from this description that the stage suggests a workspace. This is especially true as the play begins with Helena 1 seated on a trunk, sewing.

Furthermore, while unrelated to this specific kind of labor, questions of paid gendered labor in a modernizing economy come up in two other instances as well, reinforcing the play’s orientation toward women’s work in the midst of other themes that arise. In one cynical moment, Helena 1 brings up her massage therapist as “una pobre muchacha que se está muriendo de hambre para que una pueda hablar de SU masajista en las reuniones sociales...” (101). Zoila, the domestic servant who is having an affair with Helena’s husband is also highlighted in terms of her paid labor within the household. Moreover, Helena 1 provides a catalog of her own unpaid

domestic labor in her younger days, explaining how she was only free to watch her telenovela “cuando los muchachos se iban a la escuela, se habían tendido las camas, sacudido todos los objetos del polvo de la calle, reemplazado el jabón, repasado la ropa, ordenado las camisas para la semana” (99). In this way, although the play centers on a Dominican, middle class domestic space, it foregrounds feminine labor by invoking several different modes of labor throughout. Additionally, the continuous presence of the dress being sewn simultaneously speaks to a traditional domestic form of labor and, within the play’s historical context, gestures toward the growing presence of the garment industry—as an extension of the neoliberal regime in the Dominican Republic—in the social imaginary. In featuring a middle-class main character, it also highlights middle class Dominican women’s complicity with the inequalities of this new economy while also questioning the extent to which they actually benefit from it.

Additionally, if one of the main attributes of a neoliberal regime is, as the previously mentioned quote from Young argues, the ultimate disposability of feminized labor, the disposability of the aging female body in *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*—already situated within a play that foregrounds women’s domestic and wage labor—draws the audience of this work into a complex consideration of how women come to hold social value both within a society that prescribes specific gendered roles inside of a rigid family structure and within an economy that values the expendability of their labor. This general theme of disposability shows up from the very beginning of the play as Helena 1 sits on the trunk sewing while she muses: “No sé ni siento nada, excepto que el estómago me crece, que la pierna izquierda me comienza a doler, que me pelo no tiene el mismo brillo, no importa la clase de *shampoo* que utilice, que ningún hombre levanta la cabeza cuando llego al Banco o a un restaurante, que mi marido ya ronca y tengo que voltearlo para poder dormir...” (95). Here Helena 1 draws attention to her body’s inability to

conform to normative gendered expectations about what a feminine body should do—be slim and enticing to male attention. It is clear throughout the play that Helena’s body no longer gains meaning either from this gendered social role nor from its ability to perform the kinds of labor that it used to perform. As a result, it is relegated to a position of invisibility, condemned to, as Helena 2 says, and I quote, “esperar la muerte con dignidad” (110)—in other words, to wait patiently until one is finally disposed of.

It is this disposability that is at the center of Helena 1’s frustration and Helena 2’s resistance to Helena 1’s repressive attitude. In several moments, Helena 1 highlights her frustration in exclamations that, while always having a described interlocutor on the stage, seem to leap out at the audience in their force, demanding recognition. In one moment, for example, she imagines an interaction with a man that ends with an outburst as she cries: “Oye...¿me ves?...¿me escuchas? ¡ESTOY AQUÍ!...” (96). In another moment, she exclaims: “¡Mírame!, con estas tallas grandes, ropa sin ilusión para señoras en las que no piensan ni Oscar de la Renta ni otros modistos. Con estos zapatos con plantillas para juanetes y almohadillas para el arco” (101)—both speaking sarcastically about the realities of her aging body and demanding to be seen. Helena 2’s posture is an even more defiant one throughout as she declares in response to Helena 1’s concerns about appropriate clothing for women her age: “¡Me niego encasillarme! A usar ropas que otros consideran adecuadas para mujeres de ‘mi edad’” (101). In invoking clothing in this quote, Helena 2 not only rejects acceptable repertoires of femininity but also evokes once more a possible connection between her disposable aging body and the feminine bodies connected to the garment industry.

It is in the linking of this request to be seen and heard with the context of exploited female labor in the garment industry as well as the tactile presence of cloth onstage that, in a

similar but more understated way to *La otra orilla*, create a space of ethical encounter for the audience. Questions of the disposability of the female body also echo an emphasis on grievability insofar as Butler's concept speaks to those whose deaths or functional disposability to not rise to the level of general public concern. Furthermore, like in *La otra orilla*, spectators are addressed indirectly and put in the position of those who do not see or hear the other that is in front of them. The tactile presence of the creation of the dress onstage throughout the piece, as well as its connection to the bodies on the stage, breaks down the distance between spectators and the women's labor that both takes place onstage and is referenced in dialogue. This expands the ethical dilemma at the center of the play from one of simply seeing and hearing to one of feeling and responding to shared vulnerability and closeness.

Siboney

Siboney is a multimedia performance piece that was created by Dominican United-Statesian artist Joiri Minaya for a biennial contest at the Centro León in the Dominican Republic (Minaya, "Re: Video").⁷⁰ It has been featured in exhibitions in locations such as the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco ("Still Here"), Gutenberg Arts in New Jersey ("Uncatered"), LAXART in Los Angeles (Durón), Pública in San Juan, Puerto Rico ("Resisting Paradise"), Darling Foundry in Montreal (Mezzapelle), and El Museo del Barrio in New York City (Jakubowski). Even though it involves a complex installation, it is sometimes exhibited as a single video. However, in a similar way to much of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta's work⁷¹—an artist who is quoted in the piece and is a clear referent for the project—the piece is composed of an initial performance that was filmed by Minaya. It involves Minaya's recreation

⁷⁰ "Dominican United-Statesian" is the way that Minaya tends to identify herself.

⁷¹ This connection is explored in more depth below.

in mural form of a tropical print, the smudging of this mural with her body, and the final installation of the project, which includes simultaneously playing videos of both the creation of the mural and her performance of its smudging kiddy corner to the preserved wall displaying the smudged mural itself. The interplay of textile, skin, race and colonialism is a prevalent theme in Minaya's work due in part to her experience growing up spending summers in New York buying wholesale clothing that her mother would then sell in a clothing store in the Dominican Republic (Nazim and Prager). Much of Minaya's artistic work draws on this interplay. For example, a Detroit project that she completed for Red Bull Arts Detroit incorporates shirts with tropical prints that she found in thrift stores around the city (Nazim and Prager). Her "Containers" project is a series of both live and recorded or photographed performances of Minaya posing in a variety of natural settings wearing spandex body suits that cover her head to toe and feature tropical prints ("Containers"). Her "Spandex Installations" involves spandex featuring tropical prints that are formed into structures and installed in museum settings ("Spandex Installations"). Holes in the structures direct museum-goers' access to the structures. And her most recent project, "The Cloaking," involves the covering of two Miami statues of Ponce de Leon and Christopher Columbus in the same kind of spandex featuring tropical prints ("The Cloaking").

Although *Siboney* has traveled as an installation in different forms, documentation of the piece as originally conceived for the Centro León is the focus of my current analysis. This installation includes the large, freestanding wall covered in the smudged mural of Minaya's creation alongside the two short video channels of under ten minutes each. Due to its size and position jutting out from the wall of the museum where the two video channels play, the mural would be the first element of this installation that visitors are likely to notice. While in the case of Minaya's mural, the textural and draping characteristics of actual cloth are not present, the

relationship between body and cloth that has been described above and highlighted in some of the other works—the sense that cloth always contains and implies the traces of the body or bodies that have previously interacted with it—is made literal. The repetitive floral pattern of the mural—with red and light blue flowers and green, tropical-looking leaves against a deep blue background—is unmistakably based on the kind of print that one might find on a Hawaiian or tropical shirt. In fact, the exact shirt that inspired Minaya’s reproduction appears in a shot one of the video channels.⁷² Interrupting the order of the pattern, the paint is smeared all along the bottom half of the mural almost from end to end; the white backdrop shows through in some spots, in others the paint is thin and smeared while the pattern is still somewhat visible, and in still others deep blue has wiped out the other colors and details of the design. Dispersed throughout are finger marks from hands that have run parallel to the floor and faint others that have been dragged down perpendicularly on partially dried paint. The smudge on this mural, which looks like the fabric of a shirt, suggests the former touch of a body that has brushed and rubbed against, leaving behind this trace. It is the trace of this presence that would immediately confront a museum visitor upon approaching Minaya’s installation.

The centering of this smudge in the installation piece, more than any other work under consideration in this chapter, serves to challenge the primacy of the visual, using touch and its relationship to textile to emphasize an ethics that is also based in opacity. Underlying this piece, and Minaya’s work in general, is a general awareness that visibility is not in and of itself neutral

⁷² The mural also evokes the kind of tropical wallpapers like the iconic Martinique Banana Leaf Wallpaper which decorator Don Loper created in 1942 for the Beverly Hills Hotel. Some of Minaya’s work also engages with this parallel history of tropical prints, and, in fact, an installation piece of hers called *Redecode: a tropical theme is a great way to create a fresh, peaceful, relaxing atmosphere* plays with a pixelized version of Loper’s original design. Simply due to the limits of my current analysis, I am more interested in the tropical textile connection here. However, as Minaya points out in the video of her work *Containers*, both traditions of the representation and commodification of tropical prints are connected to a history in the Caribbean of the portrayal and circulation of plant life in botanical illustrations that were part of the West’s process of discovering, cataloging and understanding the Caribbean.

or good. An Afro-Dominican artist herself, she recognizes the specific historical hypervisibility of the Black body that Lowell Fiet describes at the center of the history of performance in the Caribbean, saying:

The notion of the body as a space or site of performance is by no means new in Caribbean life: precarious physical and emotional acts, personal risk, the body subjected to the desire of others; the body lesioned, violated, beaten, broken; the performance that strips, handles, and invades bodies for the critical appraisal of buyers and pleasure of spectators... (“New Tropicalism” 252).⁷³

Minaya’s work challenges the modes by which these forms of violence become perpetuated. In her work, Minaya often explicitly invokes Caribbean theorist Edouard Glissant’s aforementioned concept of opacity, which can be understood as a presentation of the self that rejects the demand for transparency as the basis for relation between others, which works against the violence of the other’s quest for dominance or understanding.⁷⁴ Glissant describes the concept of transparency, which he associates with Western thinking, as thinking that might embrace the following logic: “In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce” (190). A drive toward transparency—toward pinning down, figuring out, drawing conclusions about an other based on the limitations of one’s own worldview—reduces the complexity the

⁷³ In connecting other forms of vulnerability of the racialized Caribbean body to the performance structure of the slave auction, Fiet is directly referencing Joseph Roach’s work on slave spectacles and the way that slave markets publicly marked certain racialized bodies as property (211). In connection to this quote from Fiet, one might also think about the way racialized Latin American bodies were historically marked as inferior within the regimen de castas, which were in turn represented visually in cuadros de castas. This sense of hypervisibility also goes back to Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon’s often-cited theorization of the impact of the white gaze on the black body via the phrase, “Look, a Negro!” (93). Moreover, Simone Browne’s book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* analyzes a history of surveillance of Blackness in spaces from the slave ship to the airport to the internet. Minaya’s work, which generally addresses the violence of the gaze of the other on her own racialized body challenges all of these problematic forms of visibility experienced by the Black body.

⁷⁴ The word “opacity” is even included in one of her pieces that was created for her residency at Red Bull Arts in Detroit. Her contribution to the exhibit *Aquí y ahora* included six gold-framed tropical print shirts set against similar tropical backgrounds to create a camouflaging effect. If you look closely, you will see the word “opacity” applied onto one of the shirts in a tropical print that blends into the shirt’s own print (Red Bull).

other's identity. In contrast, Glissant describes a form of relating to the other based in opacity in the following way: "To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him" (193). In this articulation of the concept, Glissant specifically invokes a metaphor of touch—grasping—to describe a kind of relation that he rejects, arguably, in the context of my argument here, laying the groundwork for imagining other forms of touch-related metaphors that better encapsulate relation based on the preservation of opacity between others. In close connection to Glissant's work, Minaya highlights how, in relation to racialized—and more specifically Black—bodies in the Caribbean, visibility has rarely been experienced in a neutral way and an ethics based in this singular sense of things can easily turn violent in one form or another.

In multiple ways in *Siboney*, this claim to opacity provides further basis for the ethical encounter being invoked. First, an emphasis on opacity can be seen in the way the piece references Ana Mendieta's work while also centering the absent body using a more obscuring technique than the one that can be seen in Mendieta's work. The video channel that shows the creation of the mural begins with a quote from Ana Mendieta that says:

I was looked at by the people in the midwest as an erotic being, aggressive, and sort of evil. This created a very rebellious attitude in me until it sort of exploded inside me and I became aware of my own being, my own existence as a very particular and singular being. This discovery was a form of seeing myself separate from others, alone. (Mendieta in Minaya, "Siboney – Video #1")

Using this quote, Minaya situates her own work both in connection to Mendieta's and as a response to the racializing and exoticizing gaze of the other. One might notice that, like the different impressions and outlines of Mendieta's *Siluetas* series—and other pieces of hers that

are based on the trace of the human body via an outlined shape—the smudge on Minaya’s mural suggests the trace of an absent body.⁷⁵

Perhaps even more closely, Minaya’s work references Mendieta’s *Rastros corporales* series. An early 1974 photograph from this series shows Mendieta on her knees facing away from the camera and toward a white wall covered in red. The kneeling Mendieta’s hands are scraping a track down the wall as the photograph freezes her in this position. A 1982 iteration of this series is a group of red-on-white prints that remain after a live performance during which Mendieta, dressed in a white shirt, dips her hands and arms in a bowl of animal blood mixed with tempera paint and presses these appendages against sheets of white paper hanging on a wall (Walker). The prints show the distinct—albeit smeared—shapes of hands and arms. In contrast to these works by Mendieta, which feature the shape of the body, of hands, and of appendages, Minaya’s smudge has none of these attributes. While a close look would see the aforementioned way that fingers have scraped across the mural, the traces of the body in *Siboney* defy quick and easy interpretation as this close look and the act of extrapolating from the five parallel finger tracks do not foreclose any details about the body that has touched the mural. This act of obscuring the still-present traces of the body of a racialized Caribbean other functions as a demand for opacity.

⁷⁵ The photographs of Ana Mendieta’s work that I reference in this chapter are collected in the volume *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, which was edited by Stephanie Rosenthal. About the role of the body in her *Siluetas* series, Mendieta has said, “I have been carrying out a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette)... Through my earth-body sculptures I become one with the earth” (Mendieta in Rosenthal 11). The photographs in the series show, for example, a burning and charred outline of a body on a piece of driftwood, the charred imprint of a the shape of a body on dry, cracked earth, or the smashed imprint of a body in the short and dense vegetation of a swamp. Besides the way that both projects imagine and play with the traces of a racialized Caribbean body, it is worth noting, although it is beyond the scope of my central argument in this chapter, that *Siboney* similarly explores a connection with nature, but it is a tropicalized view of nature that has been imposed by the Western world onto the Caribbean.

After an initial impression of the mural, if visitors engage for long enough with the video channels accompanying the piece, they will soon realize that it was Minaya's body that left behind the trace that they see. However, the videos themselves draw on various techniques that seem to invite spectators to continue to contemplate and question what they experience visually, further emphasizing opacity. In the first video, Minaya's performance of the creation process of the mural is layered in symbolism that seems to lead spectators into making assumptions about the piece and about Minaya herself in one moment before unsettling these assumptions in the next. For example, toward the beginning of this video, Minaya is shown entering the museum dressed all in black, approaching a white bikini and white, collared, knee-length dress that is hanging on the wall, and taking them down to put them on. The dress simultaneously suggests the uniform of a hotel maid, initiation garments in an Afro-Caribbean religious tradition, the color of purity and goodness in Western epistemologies and cosmologies, and a blank canvas. Settling on any one interpretation would discount and exclude the significance of the others within the context of the piece. A similar layering of symbolism occurs in a camera shot that shows what we assume are Minaya's hands mixing a container of red paint that sits on a blue tarp. The hands crack an egg into the container and mix it into the paint. In line with other instances of Afro-Caribbean imagery in the piece—like, for example, the ritual whiteness of the dress, the use of blue throughout as a backdrop, and the ritual nature by which Minaya performs the whole creation process—the egg against the blood-red of the paint evokes the widespread use of egg in Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous American rituals of healing. However, egg is a common ingredient in some kinds of paint, so its presence is also a mundane part of the artistic process. In this portion of the video, a subtitle appears, asking spectators, "Does one interpret what one sees? Or does one see what one imagines?" In a moment where the camera zooms in on

the possible symbolism of a moment in Minaya's performance, the video, with this subtitle, completely undercuts the possibility of an interpretative process. Moments like these ones involving the dress and the egg seem to both pull spectators into assuming racialized or tropicalized interpretations of Minaya's body and performance on the one hand while also defying the primacy of these interpretations on the other. The additional facts that videos of the creation and smudging or "destruction" of the mural loop simultaneously and that visitors to the museum could encounter Minaya's performance at any point in these loops depending on when they approach the installation further accentuate the way that *Siboney* destabilizes any conclusions about its own meaning. Moreover, the looping feature itself invites spectators to continue to revisit and rethink their conclusions about what they experience while watching the videos. The constant "trick" of inviting and then eluding or challenging interpretation preserves Minaya's opacity.

This destabilizing aspect of the performance on the video channels is further accentuated by the way that Minaya slips in and out of postures that mimic tropicalized views of the racialized Caribbean female body. In the creation video, when Minaya enters the museum, she walks past a painting by Spanish painter José Vela Zanetti that is part of the Centro León collection. The video pans over this painting, which depicts the body of a "dancing mulatta" (Minaya, "Siboney – Video 1"), as the subtitles ask, "Who has a voice to speak? Who represents who? For whose gaze?" Echoing the central question from Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—as well as Mendieta's aforementioned confrontation with the exoticizing gaze—Minaya puts her installation in conversation with the question of subaltern self-representation and the impact of the gaze of the imperial other on this representation. In their seminal work related to the imposition of the gaze of the other, and Frances Aparicio and Susana

Chávez-Silverman define the term “tropicalize” as meaning “to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values” (8) to capture the way that colonizing discourses and images imagine and circulate the kind of representation of the racialized Caribbean body depicted in Vela Zanetti’s painting. The video’s engagement with the painting asks spectators to pause and consider the impact of the tropicalizing gaze that is being perpetuated. In *Siboney*, Minaya’s posture and poses perhaps more closely evoke the leisurely sprawling poses of women in Paul Gauguin’s *Parau api, (Two Women of Tahiti)*, a painting that is part of a larger body of work representing Tahitian women in a similarly tropicalized way via tropes of the noble savage; the racialized exotic—and always sexually available—beauty; and the lazy, lounging islander.⁷⁶ While Minaya recreates the relaxed poses at various moments in both videos, one moment stands out as a time when she directly confronts the exoticizing gaze of the other. In the first video, as she puts the finishing touches on the initial blue wash of the wall, Minaya lounges on the floor in front of it, her back to the camera, her knees stretched to the left and her right hand stretched to the right, and her left hand rolling paint. “I’ve seen the way you look at me, but I’m not here for you,” the subtitles announce as Minaya pauses her work and painstakingly slowly turns her head to stare directly into the camera with a steady and unaffected gaze. This moment reinforces Mimi Sheller’s claim that “embodied encounters leave space for contesting the gaze, deflecting the gaze, returning the gaze, appropriating the gaze, and destabilizing the power of the gaze...” (“Erotic Agency” 212). In this sense, returning the gaze becomes another claim to opacity as it destabilizes known scripts of power and subordination within an encounter between others.

⁷⁶ The essay “Why Is the Art World Divided over Gauguin’s Legacy?” by Meredith Mendelsohn provides a good summary of the way that Gauguin’s substantial impact on artists of the Western canon is complicated by his colorful, utopic, and voyeuristic depictions of Tahitians that amount to a racialized sexual fantasy clad in “tropical” prints that, ironically, were imported from Europe rather than native to the island.

In the context of these demands for opacity, Minaya's piece goes beyond the contested visual realm, seeming to propose a different avenue for relating to the other found in the traces on the mural and embodied in the video be appealing to a sense of touch mediated by the presence of cloth in similar fashion to the other works under consideration here. The aforementioned moment of ethical encounter created by the presence of the smudge on the mural is further accentuated by Minaya's performance of the smudging in the second video channel. In this video to the generic and repetitive sound of an Afro-Caribbean hand drumbeat, Minaya, who again situates herself in a leisurely pose like the ones explored above in relation to the first video channel, first slowly pours cup after cup of water over her hair and white dress. Her back is to the camera as if to both play into the sensuality of the pose and the action while also denying the spectator's voyeuristic access to the "full frontal" view of the scene. She then gets up and approaches the mural, throwing her wet shoulder into it as Connie Francis' version of the Cuban indigenismo composition "Canto Siboney" begins.⁷⁷ For the duration of the song, Minaya walks or crawls back and forth in front of the mural, in different moments rubbing her shoulders, hands, face, hair, chest and butt against it. Her actions are often more deliberate than sensual—even calculating—as she mostly keeps her back to the camera sometimes stepping back to consider her next move before approaching the wall again. In the video, the white dress functions as a canvas for the paint that transfers from the mural, and by the end of Minaya's performance, there is almost no white left under the smears of mixed blues, greens and reds. As the song comes to an end, she steps back, surveys her work, picks up a white sheet and wraps herself in it

⁷⁷ The use of this song works both to set a haunted and melancholic mood for the performance and to further emphasize the tropicalizing tropes that Minaya is confronting. The song is part of a body of music that Robin Moore marks as following a trend of "indigenous nationalism" (127) in *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*. The song evokes exoticized imagery related to the pre-Colombian Siboney Indians of the Caribbean in the lyrics while sounding, as it was often recorded as a foxtrot, like any other commercial tune from its time period (129-130).

so that spectators never get a look at the front of her body, a blank and tired expression on her face. In the course of this performance, as Minaya never gives in to the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator by keeping a posture that is closed and inaccessible, it is the physical encounter between dress and wall—which stands in for the shirt it represents—that is foregrounded for spectators.

In this way, *Siboney* performs the Levinasian ethical encounter in a way that foregrounds the scene of original encounter and vulnerability for both spectators and the body of the other onstage. Like in the other works analyzed here, the immediate connection between textile and body is foregrounded in a way that activates a multi-sensorial experience by appealing to spectators' sense of touch. If, going back to Marks' claim, eyes can be "organs of touch" (2), spectators in this case are asked to attune themselves both to the way that Minaya's body touches and imprints itself on the tropical shirt print and to the way that the shirt print leaves its own trace on Minaya via the smeared dress. As Minaya steps away from the mural, the now purplish mixture of paint colors covers her face and arms in a way that evokes bruises, reminding spectators of the unequal power dynamics that are being explored in the piece and the violent implications they have for racialized Caribbean bodies like Minaya's. However, the claims to opacity and Minaya's strategy of looking back and challenging the gaze that would seek to eroticize her also challenge the notion might only be transparent as the victimized and racialized Other. Instead, if the shirt stands in for the Western other, the smudge becomes a visible, tangible, and unsettling reminder of the other whose body, labor and presence have always already had an impact. The mural invites audiences to think about the way that the cloth that might touch their own body contains the irrecoverable yet undeniable trace of the other.

Conclusion

Although the way that the ethical encounter asserts a claim to opacity is more explicit in *Siboney* than it is in the other three works, all of the works included here seem to propose the efficacy of a multi-sensorial experience that includes touch for preserving some measure of opacity. This proposal is part of the ethical invitation that they extend. *Siboney* does this by inviting visitors to the museum and spectators of her recorded performance to feel the effect and traces of the body that smudged the textile-evoking mural. The piece defies the power that the gaze of the other might seek impose on Minaya's body through both the undefined shape of the smudge itself and the multi-layered, obscuring, and even sometimes confrontational way that Minaya's performance engages with the camera. In *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*, in spite of the focus in the dialogue on being heard and seen, one of the central proposals of the play seems to be to deconstruct, interrogate, and denaturalize existing repertoires of femininity that are imposed socially, culturally, and economically. Helena 2's declaration of independence at the end of the play is also a claim to opacity in its rejection of predetermined options that confine her within the domestic space on the stage. In *La otra orilla*, another work that explicitly addresses the audience, asking them to see and hear, via Rivera's sewing character in combination with the use of clothing by the other two characters in the piece, there is an aesthetic invitation that asks spectators to reevaluate assumptions that might cause them to imagine distance between themselves and the action taking place onstage. And in *La ciudadana*, Helfeld's representation of Lebrón resists the many interpretations of Lebrón's identity that have circulated both on the island and on the mainland. In these ways, the four works draw on the sense of touch as part of their aesthetics as a way to explore forms of relation between spectators and work that reject a reliance on the absolute transparency of the other. The works challenge the way that prioritizing

a logic of transparency also helps to normalize a global hierarchy of labor that fixes bodies in place and thrives on perceived distance rather than closeness. Seeming to doubt the benefits of visibility—or grievability, to return to Butler’s term—in and of itself for leading to meaningful connection between others, *Siboney* explicitly and the other works more subtly challenge the primacy of the knowledge gained and enacted through seeing and hearing the other.

It is this claim to opacity that also connects touch to ethics via a Levinasian tradition. Once again, as Sara Ahmed says, “...Levinas calls for an ethical encounter that does not satisfy the ego—that does not fill it up—but which is beyond its grasp. In this sense, his ethics is about finding a better way of encountering the other which allows the other to live, as that which is beyond ‘my’ grasp, and as that which cannot be digested into the ego or into the body of a community” (*Strange Encounters* 139). In other words, ethics can be understood a mode of encounter that may touch and respond to the presence of the other, but this response does not impose itself on this other. Moreover, as Judith Butler concludes about the relationship between “me” and the other is, “I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (84). This is similar to what Sedgwick is getting at in the quote also included above which references the way that “...To perceive texture is... to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself...” (13). Ethics, like the texture of an item like textile, recognizes the always already present impact of others on “me” and of “me” on others.

While it is true that, as Amich states in the context of her own exploration of precariousness in relation to theater and performance, “The brutality with which neoliberalism was introduced in the Americas was not uniform, but it was destructive of community everywhere” (15), the works here do not seem to find the space of the ethical encounter based in

mutual vulnerability as utopian. In *La ciudadana*, Lebrón is both an empowering figure and one that does not escape from being situated within the historic inequalities of the Puerto Rican garment industry, and the characters are never “seen” no matter how much they cry out. In *La otra orilla*, the costuming and the figure of the woman sewing onstage situate the action of the play within the same inequitable history. In a similar way, in *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*, the Helenas perpetuate the inequalities of garment industry and other feminine labor as much as they confront them due to the solidly middle-class lifestyle—with maids and massage therapists—that they embrace. And *Siboney* remains aware until the very end of the violence that the gaze of the other—a position in which the spectator is situated—can do. Moreover, a performance of garment industry labor—and all of the connotations of disposability and precariousness—explicitly appear in *La ciudadana*, *La otra orilla* and *Trago Amargo (Wish-ky Sour)*. While it does not explicitly appear in *Siboney*, Minaya’s personal history of having her mother’s work within this industry be the motivation for her initial embrace of textile in her art, in conjunction with the painstaking and arduous labor process that went into creating the piece and that evokes the racialized, laboring Caribbean body, puts a similar emphasis on precarious labor. The brutality of neoliberalism is not ignored or understated in any of these works.

It is in addition to the simultaneous presence and foregrounding of these inequalities that the works also invite spectators to consider the kind of ethics that I am calling an “erotic ethics.” If all of the works highlight global economic hierarchies that invisibilize both the labor and existence of some bodies by naturalizing their separation from others via the logic of logistics, they also draw on an ethics based in touch to challenge and counteract this logic, emphasizing closeness—the same kind of closeness that I felt at the *Y No Había Luz* exhibit that I described at the beginning of this chapter which connected labor and textile so explicitly and

immediately within the space of the museum. It is a closeness that goes beyond a simple joining of the visual with the tactile by evoking not just the previous touch but also the previous labor of others that have been in contact before a one's arrival on the scene. As clothing stands in for the medium by which the other has always already touched spectators as I have shown here, the works proposes an ethics based at this level of body in touch not just with other bodies but with the labor of other bodies. The works foreground touch as an erotic force "from below" that seeks to reorient spectators toward objects that they touch every day, inviting them to think about the others that created these objects in a way that upsets the logic of logistics which would seek to reinforce a naturalized distance from this labor. An erotic ethics seeks to prepare spectators to act based on what they have experienced, acting as the first step toward imagining what kind of world might accommodate this closeness on more ethical terms.

Concluding Remarks: Toward a Theater of Care

Over the past several years, Puerto Rico has found itself amid a snowballing series of crises that have brought the economic situation of the island into sharp relief. As I mentioned in the introduction to this project, Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria were devastating to the island when they hit in 2017. These two hurricanes were preceded by a long-developing fiscal crisis that resulted in the establishment of a non-Puerto Rican oversight board, PROMESA, in 2016. They were followed by mass protests that led to the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló in July, the further devastation created by the series of earthquakes that would begin in 2019 and continue into 2021, a global pandemic that spread through the world in 2020 and the privatization of Puerto Rico's devastated and bankrupt Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority by Luma Energy in June 2021. All of these developments both comprise and contribute to what Yarimar Bonilla has called the "aftershocks of disaster" in her introduction to the volume of the same name as she sought to capture the compounding effects that linger and radiate through an affected community after the original disaster has purportedly passed. Because a consideration of the relationship between neoliberalism, migration, and ethics has been central to this project—being especially highlighted in Chapter 3 through the concept of an erotic ethics—it seems appropriate to conclude here by considering what kind of analytic work the concept of precarious aesthetics might do in a contemporary in the wake of compounding crises. In other words, what might the role of an aesthetics that also functions as an ethics be in this emerging context?

With this question in mind, I return to the Teatro Pregones production that I used to frame the introduction to this project. As I mention in the introduction, Alberto Justiniano introduced the March 2019 staging of Teatro Pregones' well-known repertory play, *El Apagón/The Blackout* by explicitly addressing the newly arrived Puerto Rican audience members

who had left the island due to the continued devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria in 2017. But, in the wake of the devastation of the two hurricanes, which compounded the effects of the economic crisis all over the island, Justiniano's introduction, which ended with the affirmation, "El teatro is your theater," established a space of community and a space of care within a context where the physical and economic devastation experienced by Puerto Rico were met with actions and rhetoric distinctly lacking in care and kindness from those in power. The slow federal response to the hurricanes which resulted in the most widespread blackout in U.S. history, knocked out 80% of the Puerto Rican electrical grid and took almost 11 months to restore, along with the insulting video footage of then President Trump tossing paper towels into a crowd and were fresh on my mind and likely on many of the other minds gathered in that space.⁷⁸ I propose that this production was an example of what I call a "theater of care," or a category of theater that draws on aesthetic strategies to emphasize a sense of community built around a sense of mutual responsibility and care.

On the one hand, this concept is connected to a history of "care ethics" as well as to recent research in the field of theater and performance that has been interrogating the connection between care and performance both in a theatrical context and in the context of the performance of care in everyday situations, medical or otherwise. As Amanda Stuart Fisher notes, "care ethics" was a feminist strain of moral philosophy that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to explore a more concrete ethics based in the way we relate to one another (4). Virginia Held asserts that a care ethics "respects rather than removes itself from the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships" (11) and that it views people as "as relational and interdependent"

⁷⁸ See Narishkin and Yslas for a brief overview of the statistics related to the blackout during the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. See the clip of then President Trump tossing paper towels to the crowd in the YouTube video "President Trump Tosses Paper Towels at Crowds in Puerto Rico to Hurricane Survivors."

(13). This notion that care occurs in an ethical mode when situational and relational interdependence are acknowledged is key to what a “theater of care” might be. Moreover, Jean Tronto’s emphasis on the connection between politics and care speaks to another dimension of what a “theater of care” might look like as it could be understood as a space where care in a communal sense—invoked by the collective experience of attending a theatrical event itself—takes priority over the more intimate personal relationships we might associate with care in daily life. In dialogue with these previous theoretical explorations of “care ethics” part of what Christina Sharpe theorizes in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is what an “ethics of care” might look like in the wake of slavery. She herself intertwines this history with that of the contemporary global immigration crisis and even, in a follow-up commentary, with the aftermath of Hurricane Maria itself, framing an ethics of care as “daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom” through practices of “repair, maintenance, attention” (131). Sharpe’s contextualization of the concept of care within the genealogy of slavery further helps to illuminate how a theater of care is connected to racialized and colonial histories that intersect with considerations of community and relation.

On the other hand, the concept of a “theater of care” references the way that aesthetic performances of care developed in a grass roots way after Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria hit. Before the staging of *El Apagón/The Blackout* in Minneapolis in 2019 that I saw, theater and performance art had already become a fixture in the recovery process as artists provided a space for processing the ongoing trauma of the aftermath of the hurricanes. In 2017, the theater group Y No Había Luz—whose museum exhibit is featured in the introduction of Chapter 3 of this project—traveled the island performing and hosting art workshops for communities that had lost electricity (Healy). An interactive Washington Post story further highlights the work of

musicians and performance artists after the hurricanes presenting their work by explaining, “The daylight also seemed odd, as if perpetually filtered, and there was a heaviness that local artists felt in themselves and others. So they have been using performance as catharsis, to help ease the pain of their fellow citizens” (Granados and Shaul). For Granados and Schaul, the performances in the wake of the hurricane are directly connected to a process of healing. In a similar way, the news site Latino USA featured a Teatro Rodante play directed by Maritza Pérez Otero, a seminal figure of the Puerto Rican street theater tradition. The cast of the play, *¡Ay María!*, rented a mobile home and traveled through all 78 Puerto Rican municipalities performing a total of 88 times. The play is described as “a collaborative effort to process a large-scale traumatic even in realtime” (Pastor). While these are anecdotal accounts, they all seem to highlight a similar focus on healing and processing trauma in a collective way that fits within the rubric of a “theater of care.”

It is against this theoretical and contextual backdrop that I analyze the Minneapolis staging of *El Apagón/The Blackout*. Despite a change in one of the actors, the play—which is an almost verbatim staging of José Luis González’s 1970 short story “La noche que volvimos a ser gente”—unfolded in almost the exact way that I had previously watched it on the Hemispheric Institute’s video library. As the play opens, the stage suggests a bar setting, and a man—played here through the choreographed efforts of two individual actors—relates the tale of his journey home from his job at a radio factory during the Northeast Blackout of 1965. While there are two actors involved, there is a single first-person account represented in the work, and the actors alternate lines, speak in chorus with each other, and assist each other by embodying other characters referenced along the way—sometimes with their words and actions set to music played by the live band set up at back stage right. In short, after his friend Trompoloco comes to

find him at the factory where he works in order to tell him that his wife is in labor, the narrator of the piece makes his way through the city after getting trapped by the blackout in a subway car. After a series of mishaps and delays, the narrator and Trompoloco arrive just in time to first greet his newborn son and then join a spontaneous gathering on the rooftop of his apartment complex as the blackout persists.

Within the context of the play, it is the use of lighting and references to the blackout that facilitate a sense of community and collectivity within the theater space. In my original viewing of the 2007 video of the play, I was already struck by the way that the use of lighting highlights the significance of the title as the blackout becomes an interruption of work life and market logic that draws the narrator outside the walls of the factory and on a meandering—and therefore inefficient—journey across the city toward home. In this way, this performance is in dialogue with other works that have been considered in this project that disrupt market logic and productivity in varying ways. In his book about the social and cultural implications of blackouts, David Nye gives following meaning to a blackout event like the one represented in *El*

apagón/The Blackout:

Even when a blackout is apparently a random event, it is a cultural disruption. It is not just the electrical system that breaks down; the social construction of reality breaks down too. People must improvise temporary solutions to new problems, and often they must do this with strangers...A blackout unmasks the illusion that the city's appearance is 'natural' or 'normal' and confronts each individual with specific difficulties and with the larger challenge of making sense of the crisis as a whole. (33)

In this sense, just as the moment the lights go out causes a disruptive shift in the way that strangers begin to relate to one another in real life, the moment the house lights go down at the beginning of a performance causes a similar shift. The many times that the lights go up and down during the performance event emphasizes this dynamic. In several moments, the audience itself is left in a complete blackout as all stage and house lights suddenly go dark, activating a shared

and multi-sensorial experience of sitting in the dark together. It drops the audience into a shared world that they must make sense of—if not together, then at the very least with an awareness of each other’s presence that must rely on other senses besides the visual and aural which are the senses most commonly activated by a performance event.

In the wake of Hurricane Maria, the extended blackouts on the island, and the continued devastation that they caused on the island, the staging of the play in Minneapolis, and the multiple stage blackouts that left spectators in complete darkness took on another connotation as well. The electrical system and Puerto Rico began a large-scale expansion in the early 1900s on rural land owned by U.S. corporations and began in response to the U.S.’s desire to generate hydroelectric power with the irrigation systems for their sugar crops (Ficek 105). The expansion continued in tandem with the mid-century modernization projects associated with both the New Deal and Operation Bootstrap (Ficek 105). By the time the hurricane hit, the grid was already outdated (Lloréns 138), and the result was the extensive blackout on the island. In January of 2018, in the midst of the ongoing crisis, FEMA suspended its distribution of food and water on the island and instead used private shipping companies—those allowed by the Jones Act⁷⁹—to ship food and other goods to stores where they would be available for purchase (Ficek 110-111). As Rosa Ficek argues, the storm exposed and enhanced preexisting issues: “The altered space and time of disaster revealed what infrastructure had concealed. Unable to claim to be Americans, Puerto Ricans became recognizable as colonial other” (109). In other words, the stripping away of infrastructure and the ensuing neglectful response at a federal level drew the colonial situation into sharp relief.

⁷⁹ While also conferring U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans, the Jones Act, among other actions, forbid non-U.S. commercial ships from docking at Puerto Rican ports. See Morales 25-29 for further details.

The play—as well as the short story on which it is based—is already a commentary on and critique of the economic struggles and cultural displacement encountered by Puerto Ricans who have established life on the mainland. For example, in an intricately choreographed moment of the piece, the narrator describes the details of his work at the factory, but, in the telling, he performs and refers to a different way of acting that disrupts the totalizing rhythm and requirements of this workspace. First commenting on the control asserted by this environment, Jorge takes over the narration, saying, “Porque aquí el trabajo y la guachafita no son compadres. Time es money. Tú sabes” (Rolón), noting that the disorderly liveliness implied by the term “guachafita” has no place at the factory. Following this comment, he begins to describe his job:

JORGE: Y entonces, empezaron a llegarme radios por el assembly line y yo a meterles los tubos. Yep, that’s what I used to do back then. Put the tubes in the radio. Two in each radio, one in each hand. Al principio cuando no estaba impuesto, a veces se me pasaba un radio. And I would have to go running after it y echarle el ojo que venía seguido. Sometimes I thought I was gonna go crazy. Cuando salía del trabajo sentía como que llevaba un baile de San Vito en todo el cuerpo. (Rolón)

During this scene, and with synchronized movements, the actors each grab a bar stool from up stage left and position them at center stage in a row next to a small table that already forms part of the set. They return to the bar at backstage left, picking up cans and walking over to place them in pairs on the two stools and the table, transforming bar into assembly line. From here the work becomes a choreographed dance as both actors stand between the pieces of furniture, picking up the cans and passing them toward stage right, the next station in the assembly line, in time to the music that the band has started to play. At the end of the phrase “Sometimes I thought I was gonna go crazy,” the playful music comes to an abrupt halt, and the actor finishes his comment about feeling as if his body has been taken over by the force of the “baile de San Vito.” While this last comment is delivered in jest, it is important to note that because this “baile de San Vito” functions both as a reference to the kinds of movements a possessed person might be

thought to make and as another name for the convulsions of those with the degenerative Huntington's Disease, underlying this statement that the crowd saw as humorous—as well as the one claiming, “I thought I was going to go crazy”—is a reference to the often uncontrollable way that the factory work structure disciplines both body and mind. Even so, while this monotonous and repetitive work has the real potential to negatively impact both physical, mental, and even spiritual, conditions, it can simultaneously suggest a kind of action that exceeds this desire of the factory to contain and suppress, as it resignifies this labor in different terms—here as a playful dance with an imagined soundtrack. In this way, the play acknowledges the dehumanizing nature of the work while also dancing at its edges, not fully succumbing to its logic.

However, in 2017, because the blackouts in Puerto Rico had been well-covered in the mainstream media making it likely that most audience members were aware of them, it was this new context that the play's emphasis on the historic blackout now seemed to invoke thematically and aesthetically. While all the original elements of the performance were still present, it was a heightened sense of trauma, grief and, in response, care that circulated within the space of that particular performance event. Even though, as an audience, we sang together to the upbeat live music accompanying the play in different moments, reveling in that kind of joyful collective experience, grief was also palpable as Jorge Merced's voice cracked when he delivered the line, “...Pensé en Puerto Rico y en los viejos y en todo lo que dejamos allá nada más que por necesidad...” Like the other artistic and performance projects described above, this performance event became a space for processing trauma and for collective healing. However, unlike those events, this play was explicitly staged for a mainly non-Puerto Rican albeit mostly Latinx audience. This example of the “theater of care” invited all spectators into an affective experience

of care and compassion that also invoked a collective responsibility to care for those that shared that space.

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