

Comunidad y Universidad: Spaces of Decoloniality in Boricua Public Higher Education

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Abstract

The multifaceted influences of coloniality in higher education continue to be explored to reshape and transform spaces that can either reproduce structures of coloniality or bring about decoloniality. The University of Puerto Rico, the central higher learning institution of the archipelago, continues to undergo changes that are influenced by its sociopolitical context. The aims of this research included the critical observation of the influence of coloniality in the public university system of Puerto Rico through exploring community engagement by university professors. This research implemented qualitative inquiry through document analysis. Pattern analysis was performed through three conceptual frameworks: coloniality, colonial state of exception, and ecologies of knowledge. Findings included both the interruption of coloniality by university professors and the reproduction of coloniality by the university administration. These findings illustrate current spaces of decoloniality in Boricua higher education.

Keywords: coloniality, community engagement, community-university relationships, decoloniality

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Beyond the community, there is lo comunitario, which is valid as the place where a psychological feeling of being is achieved: it is those feelings of being able to ser [being yourself], of being able to estar [being in a place], of being able to aportar [contribute]; that reduce or try to reduce anomie, marginalization and allow us a sense of belonging and interaction, participation. It is these psychological feelings that make possible answers about: who am I and what is my place in society? (Hernández & López 2006, p. 19).

The history of Boricuas on the archipelago is intertwined with the history of the institutions of learning. The future, present, and past of institutions intersect with the trajectory of the Boricua identities and communities in tangible ways. The public university is an institution that is ubiquitous in the media, workplaces, healthcare, K-12 education, and government. Because of the ties with public funding, the people of Puerto Rico watchfully follow the challenges and direction of higher education (HE), especially public higher education (PHE).

In Puerto Rico, PHE faces challenges that include managing the aftermath of natural disasters, a global pandemic, and system-wide budget cuts. While developing strategies to address these challenges, cultural context becomes salient in the ways institutions choose to move forward. The historical origin of the public institutions of higher learning poses a specific challenge to address the continued reproduction or disruption of current structures of coloniality. The reproduction of these structures by HE is not exclusive to Puerto Rico but is rather a global reality. The future of PHE grants a critical analysis of the variety of ways to accomplish the desired educational outcomes. This analysis must consider enacting the mission without upholding structures of coloniality.

This study presents an opportunity to critically explore the complexities of the relationship between contemporary colonial contexts as framed by laws and policies, as well as larger aspects of coloniality within HE. Expanding research and knowledge on this topic can provide policymakers, HE administration, faculty, and staff with further understanding to transform educational practices in the pursuit of social justice. More specifically, this study seeks to address the educational systems that create and perpetuate exploited and those who exploit them or oppressed and oppressors.

Atilés-Osoria (2016) conceptualized the specific dynamics of the colonial laws in Puerto Rico as a *colonial state of exception* (CSE). CSE describes the tools, such as laws, that the United States of America (USA) has utilized to create Puerto Rico's socio-political circumstances, which creates legal subjects. Although many parts of the world exist in what some describe as "post-colonial" realities, in terms of political status, Puerto Rico's reality is that of colonial subjugation. Cruz (2019) argued that post-colonialism is an idea conceived by dominant groups and does not reflect the realities of countries that were once colonized. Coloniality has been defined by Maldonado-Torres (2016) as the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization that can continue to exist after formal independence and desegregation.

One component of HE, frequently described as outreach, is community engagement. The ideas of community engagement and how it is implemented vary widely among institutions. One common factor between universities is the idea of the community as a laboratory or place where students can polish and practice the knowledge they acquire in the institution. Community engagement approaches that center on the university, and not the community, can intentionally or unintentionally place hierarchies of knowledge in these relationships. Further consideration is needed to evaluate the HE systems in Puerto Rico as part of colonial structures. The purpose of this study was to critically observe the influence of coloniality in higher

education institutions (HEIs) in Puerto Rico. We further explored the disposition of community engagement by university professors as perpetuating or disrupting the effects of coloniality through the ways in which they engaged the local community.

Background

Although previous studies have presented the influence and impact of neoliberalism in higher education in Puerto Rico (Ruiz, 2017), the contributions of their analysis do not address the relationship between colonial laws and coloniality. This study presents an opportunity to critically explore the complexities of the relationship between present colonial contexts as framed by laws and policies, as well as larger aspects of coloniality within higher education. Expanding research and knowledge on this topic can provide policymakers, higher education administration, faculty, students, staff, and the community with further understanding to transform educational practices in the pursuit of social justice. More specifically, this study seeks to address the educational systems that create and perpetuate exploited and those who exploit them or oppressed and oppressors.

Puerto Rico first became a colony, under the rule of Spain, in the 1400s and continues to function under a colonial context, as an unincorporated territory or commonwealth of the USA. Many Latin American countries were first invaded and colonized between the 1400s and the 1500s. After the process of formally existing as European colonies, these colonies started the process of becoming independent countries, or republics around the 1800s. In many cases, more than two centuries later the structures of colonialism and coloniality persist. For this reason, it is imperative to consider the influences of coloniality, specifically in institutions that can potentially serve as hubs for reproduction or disruption of the colonial apparatus.

An institution known worldwide to be founded for the purposes of expanding colonialism was HE (Wilder, 2013). In the case of Puerto Rico, the formalization of HEIs happened after the establishment of the archipelago as a territory of the USA. The origin of the institution shaped its mission and role in Puerto Rico. The outcomes of both colonial laws and coloniality are neither obscure nor mysterious. Fanon (2004) described the reality of the colonized, the *damnés*, as stripped of autonomy and self-determination and their condition as the product of the stripping and deterioration of their land and resources. It is a combination of a suspension of mind, body, and spirit to replace the self with an entity that reproduces and perpetuates the conditions imposed by the colonizer (Fanon, 2004).

The conditions of coloniality, and the current reality of Puerto Rican society, can be met with efforts of decoloniality. Decoloniality can be represented as the reestablishing and reconstructing of what has been taken from the colonized through the dismantling of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). For example, through the ecologies of knowledge, Santos (2015) noted that in the global south there are unequal encounters between hegemonic and non-hegemonic pieces of knowledge. Non-Hegemonic knowledges are then “mobilized to organize resistance against the unequal relations caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy” (Santos, 2015, p. 199). Although there are many approaches to decoloniality this research centered exploring the idea of reestablishing mechanisms or structures utilized in ways that can return what was taken by coloniality.

In the case of PHE, engaging with a wider range of socio-political and ideological influences can guide practitioners towards re-envisioning the pursuit of the current mission. For the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), a part of the PHE system in Puerto Rico, the mission includes objectives that emphasize the

transmission and creation of knowledge at the service of the and the continued development of culture (Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2021). In general, the pursuit to serve public and private good while serving the community can (a) establish pathways between the community and the institution, (b) center community, and (c) center ways of knowing that are from the community in ways that value local needs.

Literature Review

This section highlights three areas in the attempt to deepen the understanding of the context of the relationship of the UPR and community relationships. This includes a brief introduction to fundamental colonial laws, the role of the UPR and community-university relationships.

Colonial Laws and Higher Education in Puerto Rico

In 1898 the United States of America (USA) invaded Puerto Rico and began changes in the ways they acquired territories. Atilas-Osoria (2018) described the context of the laws Puerto Rico has been subjected to since 1898 as functioning under a state of exception. There is a series of acts and laws that would further frame the relationship between the USA and Puerto Rico, the archipelago's economic development, thus HE in Puerto Rico. These include the Foraker Act, the Jones Act of 1916, Operation Bootstrap, Act 600 of 1950, the Act of 1954, and the PROMESA law of 2016. The colonial laws provide the context of the political circumstances where the UPR is situated and its role in the archipelago. The context created by the history of the archipelago, its government, and institutions frame the unique role of the public university and its relationship to Puerto Rican communities.

Role of the Public University in the Archipelago

The public university is one capable of transcending partial interests and collaborating in a nationwide project of aspiring to diversify the elites, creating an environment where all points of view can be expressed and debated with each other (Brunner & Pena, 2011). In general, the functions of the public university can include creating and disseminating knowledge, and public service (Budd, 2009; Kerr, 2001; Maurrasse, 2001; Ortega y Gasset, 1992). The UPR has served the archipelago of Puerto Rico in evolving capacities that have been delineated by its development as well as the changing global and regional socio-political conditions. The SoS Plan developed by the UPR faculty captured five services that represent the social role of the system of the UPR in the benefit of the archipelago (a) health care in the institution's medical-hospital facilities, (b) the custody and promotion of the socio-cultural, artistic, historical, scientific, and natural heritage of Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the world, (c) the promotion of entrepreneurship, cooperativism, and development of businesses in the context of sustainable and equitable development for the archipelago, (d) scientific and socio-humanistic research and innovation in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and (e) strengthening relationships and connections with all social sectors of the archipelago (PROTESTAmos, 2018).

These five services provide an overview of the current role of the UPR system in service to Puerto Rican society. These services are an extension of the mission as established by the institution and reflect what the faculty have gathered are the most relevant pillars of the relationship between the UPR and its surrounding communities.

Community-University Relationships

The present role of the UPR as established by the services they provide to Puerto Rican society reveals direct relationships with the local community. The stated mission of the UPR is currently based on Act No. 1 of January 20, 1966, “Law of the University of Puerto Rico” (“Act No. 1”), which declares that the UPR as a public institution of HE, is mandated to serve the people of Puerto Rico (UPR, 2020). PROTESTAmos (2018), presented the ways in which the institution articulates the enactment of its mission and includes multiple ways of establishing and maintaining relationships with the Puerto Rican community. These include stewarding cultural values, developing intellectual and cultural wealth, collaborating with agencies, all centering on the ideals of life in Puerto Rico.

Land-grant universities are known for having duties or pillars that include teaching, research, and extension (Croft, 2019). Collins (2012) noted that the extension pillar of the land-grant institutions connects the knowledge produced through the institution’s research with the surrounding community. Community-university relationships can be defined under the umbrella of community engagement. Oftentimes these definitions center on terms on colonial interests or legacies, the extraction of knowledge, transactions, and self-serving individualistic interests designed to hold the university as a beneficiary. This research stems from the idea that universities, especially land grants, are indebted to their communities. First and foremost, because of the ways in which the land they sit on was acquired, but also because of the role and responsibility of universities that proclaim that their mission, as well as their funds, are tied to the local community.

In the USA, state universities across the 50 states and also the USA territories, are largely funded by local and federal funds. In Puerto Rico, PHE was funded up to 40% until 2021. Extending the benefits of turning the community into a learning and research laboratory can replicate attitudes and behaviors that serve more as a parasitic relationship, rather than a symbiotic relationship that exhibits at least mutualism.

Theoretical Framework

The first framework used in this study was Atilés-Osoria’s (2018) colonial state of exception which provided a legal base for the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the USA. Second, were coloniality perspectives and frameworks presented by Cruz (2019), Smith (2013), and Maldonado-Torres (2016) which guided the aims of the study from a political framework of dissolving the colony as a matter of political status, to addressing the ideological realities that can exist independently of political status and condition. Lastly, ecologies of knowledge (Santos, 2015) which provided an outlook that can expand the possibilities of community self-sufficiency by addressing the power hierarchies that exist by placing value on specific types of knowledges.

Colonial State of Exception

Atilés-Osoria (2018) described previous assertions of what a state of exception means outside of colonial paradigms. For example, a non-permanent, or temporary suspension of state law to address a specific period where there is a circumstance of political violence, economic crisis, or natural disaster. This suspension of law occurs under what can be known as a state of emergency and utilizes specific situations that are deemed as a crisis. When these crises occur alternative pathways to what is established as law can

occur to manage the specific circumstance. The critical issue in this suspension is that instead of being used infrequently, it becomes the norm and a tool for colonial domination in colonial territories. The colonial state of exception entails the enactment of legal systems that create a socio-political reality of the creation of colonial subjects by the colonial government (Atilos-Osoria, 2016).

One recent example of a colonial state of exception is the establishment of the Puerto Rico Oversight Management, and Economic Stability Act or PROMESA (S. 2328, 2015-2016) by the U.S. government to manage the economic crisis (US Congress, 2016). The word *promesa* in Spanish means promise which was carefully selected to give notions to the people of Puerto Rico of prosperity. This law will be in place for years until their mission of handling the local economic crisis is resolved. The repercussions produced by the mechanisms imposed to redefine the local economic, political, and legal structures are not exclusive to one institution. Furthermore, PROMESA, as well as other colonial laws and acts, are the frame that defines the power and hierarchies that influence relationships that guide the functioning of institutions on the archipelago, including HE.

Coloniality

Cruz (2019) presented the historical background of structures of coloniality and their impact on current Bolivian society. It is important to note that although similarities persist throughout countries with a history of colonization, their contexts are unique. The act of colonization itself is based on the idea of power. Because of the political independence of Latin American countries, and globally, there is tangible proof that the structures put in place by colonialism that harmed both colonized and colonizer, as Fanon (2004) described are still present.

For this reason, to better understand these relationships of power in this study the context of Puerto Rico that will be expounded on the decoloniality framework incorporates the notions described by Maldonado-Torres (2016). Previous descriptions and work on coloniality include scholars such as the Argentinian Walter Dignolo, and Peruvian Anibal Quijano. This concept began to be described by these scholars in terms of power in different sectors of society (Quijano, 2007). The way they framed this idea was that the coloniality of power had impacted several areas that include authority, sexuality, knowledge, and the economy. These relationships have an impact on how the world works, in direct relationships with others, but one of the key aspects is our relationship to ourselves, the general understanding of being (Maldonado, 2007).

Maldonado-Torres (2007) presented three elements of coloniality: coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being, and coloniality of power. Later, Maldonado-Torres (2017) presented ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality. Both their elements of coloniality, as well as the ten theses delineated were considered in this study to deepen our understanding of the influence of coloniality on community-university relationships.

As previously noted, Maldonado-Torres anchored coloniality in the coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being, and coloniality of power. The coloniality and decoloniality framework utilized throughout this research is a result of weaving the ideas of Cruz (2019), who identifies as an Aymara from Bolivia, Smith (2012) who identifies as Māori from New Zealand, Maldonado-Torres (2016) a Boricua from Puerto Rico, and Fanon (1974) an Afro-Martinican. The application of these frameworks stems from the reality of power hierarchies impacting the functioning of institutions and society at large through power imbalances and oppression.

Ecologies of Knowledge

In many ways, these hierarchies of power have a close relationship with the production of knowledge, what is deemed and perceived as valid knowledge. Santos' and Cruz present two examples of knowledge hierarchies. Santos's *ecologies of knowledge* (2015) presented the relevance of understanding and implementing the concept of multiple knowledges and cognitive justice. The idea of the imbalance in the value of indigenous ideas as the supposed lack of knowledge from *pueblos originarios*, or indigenous peoples, is merely the lack of a presence of ideas and ways of thinking that emulate how the *elite blancoide* did (Cruz, 2019).

Methodology

The purpose of this document analysis, as part of a case study research, was to explore community engagement in the socio-political context of the USA coloniality in the archipelago of Puerto Rico. This project aimed to explore the research question: How does coloniality in Puerto Rico influence community engagement by university professors? Using a document analysis methodology, the following sections include the rationale for the research design, the site and document selection, data collection processes and organization, data analysis, matters of trustworthiness in the study, the researchers' role, limitations, and conclusions.

Study Design

This document analysis engaged a qualitative methodological approach to provide a humanistic focus (Gephart, 2004) that centered and valued the voice of the researched and was sensitive to its context by providing detail within the research setting (Bell et al., 2018). Qualitative research methods were utilized to reframe narratives that are dominant to consider a perspective that incorporates not only individual strengths but also those strengths and resources at a community level (Brodsky et al., 2016). The community-level lens provided the opportunity to search for responses to systemic issues, as well as served to develop thick descriptions of systems, theories, and processes in a holistic manner that engaged the identification of the factors and hypotheses that elicit deeper research (Brodsky et al., 2016). The qualitative tool used in this study was document analysis, but it will expand into a full case study utilizing observations and interviews in the future.

The UPR has a total of 11 campuses from where the Humacao campus is a 4-year associate and bachelor's degree-granting public institution with 3,218 undergraduate students enrolled in 2021 (NCES, 2021). This institution was established in 1962 as the inaugural regional college of the UPR system (Alvarez & Raffucci, 2005). The UPRH hosts the social sciences bachelors focused on social action research, locally known for their acronym INAS/ITIAS. This program engages in participatory action research (PAR) through horizontal relationships and deep reflections of how the university engager in power structures. INAS/ITIAS aims to collaborate with the communities in the development of non-governmental initiatives to address poverty and inequity. The INAS/ITIAS program states that the social function of the UPR is to form a part of a system of collaboration that includes the government, local institutions, the private sector, non-governmental agencies, and communities (UPRH, 2020). The program's mission is that this collaboration will guide the solving of the common problems faced by Puerto Rican society (UPRH, 2020).

Another important part of the study, in addition to the selection of the study site, is the delimitation of the documents analyzed in the study.

Site Selection

The scope of this study focused on the context of the public system of HE in the archipelago of Puerto Rico. To better understand the impact of coloniality on community engagement we selected a range of sources elaborated by faculty to explore the research question. This approach allowed to enrich the exploration of the research question through documents that can frame the research questions through the different nature of these documents, For example, government-generated documents and the faculty response to such documents; faculty essays; syllabi; institutional strategic plans; and papers. These documents were directly related to the UPR through budget materials and system-wide faculty-generated documents. Specific documents were analyzed from the UPR Humacao (UPRH) campus as well as from the Social Sciences Social Action Research bachelor's degree program offered in the Humacao campus located in the southeast region of Puerto Rico.

Data Collection

Documents were selected from a range of sources to follow Flyvbjerg's (2011) concept of falsification. This process was included as a part of the critical reflexivity which engages deviant cases or observations, those not in harmony with the researcher's propositions and are intentionally sought by the researcher to increase the rigor of the methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Thus, seeking falsification not confirmation of the researcher's preconceived notions forms a central part of understanding the perceptions, ideas, and behaviors of the social actors of the case study (Diamond, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Document Analysis

Documents have been described as "ready-made sources or materials" that can include public records, personal documents, and physical materials (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Documents are relevant to this case study because of their potential to reflect the interest of their authors (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), as well as a source of the ideas and values represented by the document (Hitchcock, et al. 1995). Document analysis was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the case from multiple sources. An important piece of information to evaluate was the fiscal plan (FP-UPR) of *la junta*, government, and university strategic plans. Lastly, specific public records from the CISO-INAS program included the documents on their official webpage and documents that record the program projects.

The initial approach to document analysis follows the guiding questions by Merriam (1998), as well as Saldaña and Omasta (2016). These guiding questions interrogate and explore (a) the history of the production and use of the document, (b) how we gained access to the document, (c) the authenticity of the document, (d) the identity of the author of the document, © the perspective of the document, (f) how it draws the attention of the intended audience, and (g) the existence of documents related to the one being analyzed that can assist in a greater understanding.

The documents were evaluated for basic descriptive categories as well as using a systematic approach to describe the content and possible meaning of the communications (Merriam, 1998). The goal of the analysis of documents for this case study was to include perspectives that will assist in the critical exploration of the phenomenon being studied.

Codes and Themes

The coding of the documents was done by mixing the use of qualitative analysis software, Dedoose, and manual coding. This strategy was implemented considering Smith's (2013) consideration of research as a social, intellectual, and imaginative activity. The process of data analysis, specifically in the context of coloniality, engaged disparate, fragmented pieces of a larger puzzle (Smith, 2013). Thus, approaching research as an imaginative activity permitted it to transcend the material, empirical realities and resist the placement within a dehumanizing world and the creation of new possibilities beyond coloniality (Smith, 2013). In addition to utilizing codes as a strategy for categorizing the data (Maxwell, 2013), groupings of the data according to the meaning and pattern as it relates to the phenomenon under study, were compiled into categories (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

Within the notions of decoloniality approaches, it is crucial to state the role of the researchers that engaged in this document analysis. With two authors in this paper, we sought to increase self-awareness through the reflection of the impact of our lens as they relate to our identities. The first author on this project is from Puerto Rico and is intricately connected to the data collection and expansion of the case study. The second author is White and from the US and contributed to the design of the study and the analysis. Korstjens and Moser (2017) proposed that the perception of a context and circumstance is constructed by the individual's social, cultural, historical, and personal context. In sum, we acknowledge the influence of the researcher in the research process, as well as the possible consequences of speaking for, and speaking out, in matters of qualitative research that engage social injustices (Smith, 2013).

Findings

The influence of coloniality as imposed power hierarchies permeates the history and present of the university. The documents that we analyzed in this study represented different sectors that engage directly with the university such as *la junta*, UPR administration, and faculty members. The mention, emphasis, and approach to similar aspects of the university are represented by discourses. Three main findings were (a) the creation, definition, and preservation of *la cultura puertorriqueña*, (b) the return of investment of government funds, and (c) service to the community.

Creation, Definition, and Preservation of *la Cultura Puertorriqueña*

Universities in general are known for their legacies of power. For example, as instruments of colonization (González & Hsu, 2014; la paperson, 2017; Livsey, 2016; Wilder, 2013). What can be known as having a powerful impact on social mobility in some universities and communities can be in other types of universities as the continued reproduction of elites and economic inequalities. Alvarez and Raffucci (2005) captured an important fact about how faculty was viewed that we can interrogate.

La cultura puertorriqueña, Puerto Rican cultura is not defined by the UPR. For the context of these findings, we will consider the definition brought forth by Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (2021), "...national culture as the product of the integration that in the course of four and a half centuries had taken place in Puerto Rico, between the respective cultures of the Taino Indians that populated the Island at the

time of the Discovery, of the Spaniards who conquered and colonized it, and African blacks who, as early as the first decades of the 16th century, began to join our population.”

The diverse documents that were a part of the document analysis included a strong presence of the concept of preservation of the cultura puertorriqueña. Santory, a member of the faculty at UPR Rio Piedras, which wrote an essay for La Torre, a part of the collection of faculty essays edited by Alvarez and Raffucci (2005), reiterated the promotion and custody of cultural property as an assigned social function of the UPR (PROTESTAmos & APRUM, 2018). This notion is echoed in a diversity of documents including the collection of faculty essays in the book La Torre which recounts the history of the UPR from its origins to 2005 (Alvarez & Raffucci, 2005), the SOS Plan a data-driven and research-based document elaborated by faculty as a reaction to la juntas fiscal plan for the UPR (PROTESTAmos2018), the strategic development plan of UPRH (2013), and la junta’s fiscal plan for the UPR (FOMB, 2020). La Torre captured from past to present the development of the UPR as a current “cultural center of the country” (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. XIV). As part of the structure of the university, one of the areas that were mentioned to draw attention due to the need to focus on Puerto Rican culture and identity was the UPR’s curriculum during the early development of the university. Picó, a faculty member at UPR-RP stated that what was known to be Puerto Rico was unclear, but it was clear that “the claim is that the university studies Puerto Rico more and the West less.” (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. 8). Picó also addressed:

Today it seems absurd to us that in the past we tried to repress Puerto Rican expressions of identity, but with less ease, we admit that alternative ways of defining Puerto Ricanness or the lack of it must coexist. It is easy to criticize today the Eurocentric dogmatism that tied us to The Iliad, The Prince and Faust, but it is less easy to admit that perhaps the classic authors of the Puerto Rican literary canon manifested limiting visions of the African, the feminine, and the culturally hybrid in our Caribbean. (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. 19).

Now retired professor Magali García Ramís, described the marginalization of the Puerto Rican culture and identity in the UPR in the 1910s: “The omission of Puerto Ricans from the university curriculum is an accurate indicator of how everything that concerns the island, and its identity was marginalized from the educational and cultural sphere of the institution in those years.” (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. 65). Another example of the development of Puerto Rican culture through the university in the first half of the century after the invasion is provided by architect and professor Enrique Vivoni Farague in their description of the construction of *la Torre*. Vinoni shared that the main tower at the UPR-RP campus in the 1930s was “the most dignified example of our Spanish heritage: it embodied the Puerto Rican cultural project.” (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. 127). Professor Malena Rodríguez Castro shared the struggle in the 1940s to include as part of the academic offering at UPR a course about Puerto Rican culture (Alvarez & Raffucci, 2005). Dra. Castro emphasized the absence in these debates of the reality that (Alvarez & Raffucci 2005, p. 165):

...it established the lineages and practices of the culture in a filial account of roots and continuities in Western Europe, and the Puerto Ricanists who, in a similar way, backbone it nationally, was to obliterate other positions that were not recognized in such distension or they take refuge in other thresholds, of ignoring the potential of porosity and exchange of knowledge, of its constant renewal and emergence, of its renunciation of being confined to binary locations, even those with the strength and prestige of traditions.

In relation to more recent times in the history of the university, the 2020 FP-UPR includes a small reference in the annex that describes the institutional background that the law that supports the creation of the UPR system includes in its mission the “development and enjoyment of the fundamental, ethical, and esthetic values of Puerto Rican culture...” (FOMB 2020, p. 54). Lastly, the strategic development plan for UPRH makes mentions “the need to redefine the reaffirmation of Puerto Rican culture in a comprehensive framework.” (UPRH 2020, p. 7).

Return of Investment for Government Funds

The origin of the UPR responded to a societal need of forming teachers. Later it developed into a land grant which was intended by the SMA to engage societal needs and economic growth of local communities. The 2020 FP-UPR includes the trajectory of the largest budget cuts in its history. This document summarizes la junta’s priorities for the UPR. Increasing tuition, increasing external funds, reducing operational expenses, all with the purpose of making the transition from an institution that was greatly supported by local law, Law 1 of 1966, as a government institution to a model that mimics the institutions in the continental USA. The immediate goals presented by la junta establish a bottom line for UPR and be profitable for the government to stabilize the economy by reducing government appropriations for the institution. For example, “...the Oversight Board affords the UPR an opportunity to review carefully its finances and operations...to put in motion the major operating model changes that will allow it to achieve the financial targets set for the period from 2020 to 2025” (FOMB 2020, p. 11).

One prominent argument in the report is the comparison to “mainland” universities. Which establishes a power dynamic of “the rest” or “the other”. The plan proposes tuition increases by stating “...reasonable increases in both undergraduate and graduate tuition to move UPR more in line with the tuition receipts generated by its mainland peers without putting accessibility for low-income students at risk.” (FOMB, 2020, p. 22). The FP-UPR decenters the mission and goal of the UPR to serve the Puerto Rican community and heavily positions the UPR on a path to seek profit as a return of investment.

The SOS plan is a report created by UPR faculty members originally in 2017 and updated in 2018 as a response to la junta’s 2017 decision to declare the UPR as a non-essential government service to begin massive budget cuts to the institution. The faculty made a clear argument against the budget cuts by presenting their analysis of the impact of the UPR on the local economy. “The UPR ensures a multiplier economic effect in various sectors of economic activity, at a rate of \$1.56 for every dollar invested in it.” (PROTESTAmos, 2018, p. 3). In 2019, PROTESTAmos (2019, p.1) developed a policy brief that summarizes key aspects of their analysis and includes that the UPR “provides a 20% return of investment in human capital”.

Service to the Community

The origin of PHE in Puerto Rico and the possible reason for the prevalence of a strong sense of responsibility to serve the community can be traced to the land grant past and present of the UPR. Documents generated by the campuses, including the mission, or faculty-generated documents, such as the SOS plan present the role of the university as one embedded in its local community. The current UPRH strategic plan for 2021 states that the university has an obligation to be in service to the people of Puerto Rico (UPRH, 2013). Documents that address earlier times in the UPR, the 1930s, state that the community manifested criticism towards the University because of their alienation from Puerto Rican life (Alvarez &

Raffucci, 2005, p. 108). Despite these notes by professor Vivoni in La Torre, professor Santory expressed in the SOS plan that “the UPR is backed by a history of more than one hundred years as a beacon of civic participation, critical thinking and community service in and for the country” (PROTESTAmos, 2018, p. 6).

From the general aspects of the idea of serving the community through statements in the mission, a more specific approach is presented in documents with ties to the UPRH. These documents include the strategic plan for UPRH, INAS syllabi, and faculty-generated documents. The INAS program stated in a presentation of a PAR project that the program is characterized by “looking to support the process of community empowerment that can facilitate a community and a society that are sustainable, happy, collaborative, empathetic, and safe in all of Puerto Rico” (Cruz-McDougall & Millan, 2016). In this collaborative study, student researchers, faculty, community, and local government worked together to address a specific need. The methodological approach led by UPRH faculty provides a vision of transformative leadership development, community development, and multisector alliances. The document clearly delineates the purpose of INAS as upholding the mission of forming citizens that contribute mainly to Puerto Rico.

López (2011) described the relationship between communities and universities from the perspective of faculty as one that could be falsely confused with one that requires a focus on doing and not on knowing or creating knowledge. They proceed to emphasize that for the university to be a part of that doing it must be vulnerable to feeling the world. This refers to reconnecting with its relevance to society through the creation of links with local projects and communities that are generated in the country. López describes PAR as one of the tools for the university to engage in reconnecting with relevance. Hernández and López (2006) presented that university-community relationships involving academia take on the challenge to focus on *de lo comunitario*, which stems from, belongs to, or is from the community. The professors propose seeking horizontal relationships between communities and universities where knowledges are for both and from both. The aim of their approach is to transform both spaces, the university from the community and the community from the university (Hernández & López, 2006). This notion is illustrated in a street mural that reads: there is no university without community (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Mural in the urban area of Río Piedras, blocks away from the UPR-Río Piedras campus. Photo by the authors.



Discussion

Three sources of power are presented in the findings. The first is the establishment of a dominant culture. The second is a colonial, political power hierarchy that is visible through establishing a university focused on the return on investment. Thirdly, the struggle to establish decoloniality approaches such as horizontal relationships between communities and the university.

¿La Cultura de Quién?

The origin of the UPR coincides with the early years of the USA colonization. Puerto Rico's history is characterized by double colonization. The first inhabitants of the archipelago were the Tainos who were later invaded by Spain who brought enslaved Africans. As expressed in the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña's (2021) definition still today la cultura puertorriqueña is locally known and defined by these three main groups. In 1898 the USA began to impose certain measures that in the university were met with resistance. Faculty members then advocated for the definition and preservation of Puerto Rican culture through at least language, representation, curriculum, and architecture. Faculty expressed in *La Torre* that although these efforts were being put forward, there wasn't clarity about which culture was being centered (Alvarez & Raffucci, 2005).

Although the origin of the struggle to define and protect local culture was questionable, its evolution has become central to resisting the colonial interest in extracting everything that Puerto Ricans are, including the capacity to solve problems and contribute to the development of sustainable and functioning communities. In the past, as documented in Alvarez & Raffucci (2005) faculty engaged in the defense of curricular development that reflected the ethnic and national identity of the majority. Currently, the faculty lead these efforts through the implementation of practices that lead students to have accountability and responsibility to solve local problems, think locally, serve, and develop a sensibility to be a part of a collective Faculty and administration from the UPRH acknowledge the relevance of this part of the mission, but express the need to evaluate this notion and create a framework to integrate it

(UPRH, 2013). The notion of destabilizing the current cultural hegemony is a direct way faculty and administration at UPRH position themselves toward decoloniality.

Money is Power

The UPR has been funded at both federal and local levels for more than half a century. Local funding was formalized through Act number 1 of 1966 where 9.6% of government appropriations were to be provided for the UPR to be cemented as a local institution dedicated to the betterment of Puerto Rican society. In 2017 a non-elected board was appointed, la junta, and exceptions in law began under the budget crisis they were tasked to solve. One of the targets to collect the debt, one of the reasons for the crisis, was to begin millionaire budget cuts to the UPR. La junta's main argument is that UPR is not following the steps of HEIs in the continental USA. These institutions follow a market approach where the institution is mainly supported by tuition.

After the release of la junta's 2017 FP-UPR, the UPR's faculty published an economic analysis, and a wealth of suggestions to avoid these budget cuts. In 2019, the faculty contributed to publishing a policy brief that will continue to expand on the effects of the budget cuts in the archipelago of Puerto Rico (PROTESTAmos, 2019). The effect of la junta on the UPR's present and the influence on the focus of the institution's resources in this case the faculty's wellbeing, time, effort, and morale is a power struggle between a formal colonial structure and the UPR. The documents produced by this entity are highly publicized and although the impact of this image, profit-making, is not the focus of our study we can ponder on the effects of community-university relationships as a product of the newly imposed measures.

The FP-UPR makes a strong case for the power hierarchy between la junta and the UPR. The UPR is described by la junta as an engine of social mobility and social change in the fiscal plan "... [the UPR] required to preserve the Island's critical engine of economic and social mobility..." (FOMB 2020, p. 11). Despite being described as a powerful tool for the well-being of Puerto Rico, la junta's actions and plans presented in the plan provide hierarchical measures that do not accurately consider the socio-political context and implications of the plan. This approach is a stark contrast to the community approach of faculty at UPRH.

A university is a place of power and oppression, its origins, legacy, and structures. As la paperson (2017) stated, the university is an assemblage that will be influenced by the work of internal entities, which they call *scyborgs*, disturbances that are constructed in the assemblage.

¿Les de Abajo o les de al Lado?

Maldonado-Torres (2016) and Cruz (2019) presented power struggles in relation to hierarchies. We have evaluated thus far two hierarchical relationships, culture, and money. The third struggle was presented in the findings as service to the community and we are going to expand this through the idea of relationships. In the context of the work at UPRH's INAS/ITIAS, this approach is in harmony with their purpose of creating horizontal relationships with all members of the community. This approach expands the notions of service to the community as established in the mission or mentioned by government institutions as an assigned role for the UPR. Considering the destabilization of coloniality, the questioning of the invisible power structures, such as the physical structure of *la torre* at UPR-RP, in this case through relationships in itself an act towards decoloniality.

Power and coloniality are characterized by hierarchies and the imposition of a way of being onto other groups. The university is a place of power, despite this reality, UPRH's INAS/ITIAS presents methodologies that permeate the university that center on interrogating this power, centering this self-awareness on their students, and approaching the community in ways that position the community as decision-makers. "The student will reflect upon the concepts of power, ideology, conscientization, participative community, and citizen participation based on their experience at the communities." (p1. CISO-INAS, n.d.). This is how Maldonado-Torres' presents the final tenants of decoloniality. The *damné* is in a position where they emerge as creators, agents of social change, and part of a collective project. "*Actuar porque ya se está actuando, ...hacer porque ya se está haciendo, ...transformar porque ya se está transformando*" (López, 2011). Professor López described as documented in the transcription of their presentation about PAR the ways in which knowledges, communities, institutions, scholars, and faculty are intertwined in social action. This action is not spearheaded by the university, it is already in motion and the sensitized university responds to this social reality by becoming a part of it to transform the country, Puerto Rico.

Implications and Conclusion

Through the documents and discourses that were analyzed, we can observe the distinct instruments of coloniality and their influence on community-university relationships. La junta, is not the exclusive colonial machinery, but one of the instruments that elaborates rules, and "guidelines" and suspends law as is well described by Atilés-Osoria (2016). This suspension of law and legal authority reinforces the power hierarchy between the USA and PR by eliminating local voices and autonomy. The direction of the university is set by la junta. This external force restricts and shapes the actions of institutional agents such as the faculty which can be observed and evaluated from faculty-generated documents such as the SOS plan and the policy briefs.

The documents that were analyzed provided context and voice to explore the presence and influence of coloniality in the UPR. We sought falsification and a general overview of the UPR through documents such as the FP-UPR and the SOS plan, to the UPRH specific documents. Maldonado-Torres (2017) emphasizes as one of the tenants of decoloniality the action of destabilizing power through the centering of the collective. The focus of INAS/ITIAS includes the development of "promoting, facilitating, and protecting citizen participation, equity, pluralism, collective, collaborative, participative, and democratic processes and products."; "social responsibility with matters that affect the country, beyond individual or work responsibilities" (UPRH, 2021). In conclusion, one of the most salient ways of advancing decoloniality explored through this analysis was the pursuit of the decoloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Restoring in the community what has been taken by the colonizer.

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