

**HURRICANES AND THE SOUNDS OF CHANGE:  
PUERTO RICAN ENVIRONMENT, REGGAETON,  
AND BORICUANESS**

A Thesis Presented for the  
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## DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to the victims of hurricane Maria, and to my loving mother Margaret Sineath Carpender who has supported me in all my endeavors.*

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## ABSTRACT

In the summer of 2017, reggaeton took the world by storm, topping popular music charts globally with the song “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee, and leading to a short-lived surge in Puerto Rican tourism. The term boricua holds strong connections to reggaeton and generally expresses a call to indigenous and Spanish heritage. While music videos and the general popularization of reggaeton created an image of Puerto Rico as a desired destination, the conditions of the island’s environment swiftly changed due to the destructive effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria in August and September of 2017. In light of these events, I embarked upon a journey to further understand the connections among reggaeton, boricua identity, and this climate-caused disaster. This undertaking involved my employment of ethnographic methods, primarily conducting fieldwork in the southeastern United States and San Juan, Puerto Rico. In this fieldwork, I conducted interviews, took photographs and videos, made soundscape recordings, translated song lyrics, and analyzed how globalized reggaeton impacts local scenes. Through key interviews and observations, my ethnography shows that boricuas have inscribed their places after hurricane Maria through reggaeton. Further, I demonstrate that reggaeton interacts in multifaceted ways with Puerto Rican politics, socioeconomic conditions, environmentalism, cultural representation, and expressions of place. Intriguingly, this music now plays a large role in ecotourism for Puerto Rico. This thesis shows how reggaeton demonstrates a local understanding of boricua identity and environment after the tragedies of hurricane Maria. I argue that boricuas create a sense of cultural sustainability through reggaeton as they cope with the effects of hurricane Maria. This sustainability occurs in global and local examples, both on the island and within the southeastern United States diaspora.

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## CHAPTER I

### REGGAETON, COLONIAL SPACE, AND BORICUA IDENTITY

#### Island Connections

In the summer of 2017, I traveled to see my family who live on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. While I was visiting my sister, we decided to go fishing at the northernmost point of the island, Dolphin Head Beach. This part of the island has suffered much ecological degradation with constant changes in the environment from vast tidal surges. This stoic beach stands isolated from many other parts of the island and can at times be dangerous to traverse. During the walk to our desired location on Dolphin Head, I contemplated environmental issues as I observed the surrounding beautiful and eerie scenery. We had arrived at our typical spot after a long walk down this sandy coast. Just after setting up, my sister played me a song that she had recently heard on the radio and thought I might enjoy. While listening, I was drawn to the unique rhythmic patterns, acoustic guitar, hip-hop accompaniment and expressive vocals, all of which conjured images of Caribbean beaches. I immediately connected this song to my real and imagined surroundings: its reggae feel suggested the natural environment of the beach, while elements of hip-hop reminded me of urban settings. However, my stereotyped impressions of this song were challenged one year later when I heard it anew, now connected to the genre of reggaeton, Puerto

Rican tourism, and the destructive forces of hurricanes Irma and Maria. It was from here that I embarked on my journey.

The song my sister played for me was “Despacito” [Slowly], by Puerto Rican musicians Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee (2017). That summer in 2017, it had taken the world by storm with its unique kinetic rhythmic quality, acoustic guitar, and hip-hop beat. According to Chris Martins (2017), its global success rose “within a month” to be “the most-viewed music video of all time on YouTube (over 4 billion views) and scoring three Grammy [nominations], including record and song of the year” (p. 50). Moreover, Leila Cobo (2017) reported that “Despacito” nearly doubled Puerto Rican tourism within the summer and fall months that it topped the charts (p. 12). Significantly, while this large growth in Puerto Rican tourism benefited local communities, its positive impact swiftly decayed due to the destructive effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria in August and September of 2017.

The song introduced me to the genre of reggaeton, and it raised my curiosity about its significance within Puerto Rico and for *boricuas*. The term *boricua*, according to Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2004), represents “the indigenous name many Puerto Ricans [call] themselves in a nativist gesture to indicate the end of a colonial subordination and the beginning of a still politically undefined new era” (p. xiii). I interpret boricuaness as a feeling of shared cultural identity that embraces both indigenous and colonial Spanish heritage. In this sense, being *boricua* is a claimed state of being, often attached to reggaeton

culture, that many take in opposition to persistent oppression of Puerto Rico from the United States' colonial politics and culture. Reggaeton historically comes from urban neighborhoods with poor socioeconomic conditions (Marshall, 2010). Moreover, reggaeton songs, with their mixture of hip-hop, reggae, and unique repetitive rhythmic pattern (Rivera-Rideau, 2015), express for many boricuas a longing for freedom from a colonialist oppressor.

In a time of climate-caused disasters, my research addresses music, environment, sustainability, and political ecology for Puerto Ricans as they respond to the challenges generated by Irma and Maria. Sustainability arises as a significant concern in my research, which queries issues of viable and safe living conditions, survival of community, and economic stability. Drawing upon ecocritical studies, I view boricua culture through a lens of sustainability to provide insights into the relationship of political ecology and music (Schippers & Grant, 2016). For me, sustainability refers to equipping Puerto Rico to deal with future hurricanes and stabilizing socioeconomic conditions by addressing what I view as four pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, economic, and aesthetic (Allen, Titon, & Von Glahn, 2014). This thesis shows how reggaeton demonstrates a local understanding of boricua identity and environment after the tragedies of hurricane Maria. I argue that boricuas create a sense of cultural sustainability through reggaeton as they cope with the effects of hurricane Maria. This sustainability occurs in global and local examples, both on the island and within the southeastern United States diaspora.

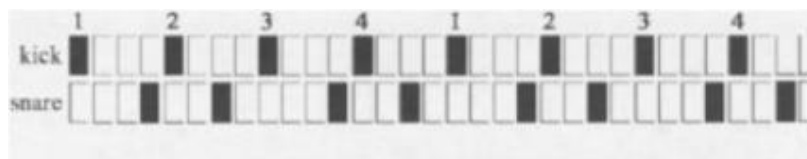
## **Don't Stop that Beat: Origins of Reggaeton and its Role in Popular Culture**

In 1995, reggaeton began to gain traction in Puerto Rico, and by the early 2000s it swiftly grew in popularity amongst young communities on the island and in the diaspora (Marshall, 2010). The genre launched into the mass media during 2005, especially through the successes of Puerto Rican performers Daddy Yankee and Don Omar, with most of its popularity centered in the cities of New York and San Juan (Flores, 2018). Wayne Marshall, Raquel Rivera, and Deborah Hernandez (2009) detail the complexity of reggaeton in cultural expression stating, "its suggestive sonic and cultural profile has animated contentious debates around issues of race, nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language" (p. 1). Thus, tense political situations concerning expression of identity found in reggaeton formed political divides, and for many created a dim view of the genre. However, in recent years, attitudes towards reggaeton have shifted, with a growing acceptance of its inclusion into the Puerto Rican soundscape.

Shrouded in a blur, reggaeton's beginnings emerged from a mixing of several genres important across the Caribbean; controversy persists over its origins. Most debates center around its geographic creation and conflicts between Panama and Puerto Rico. However, Wayne Marshall (2010) defines reggaeton as a "Puerto Rican and, increasingly, pan-Latino fusion of hip-hop and dancehall reggae" (p. 1). He later adds that reggaeton developed at the turn of the 21st century as record producers began to commercialize it across Latin America. Musicians in San Juan took influence from musical genres found in

New York (hip hop), Panama (dancehall), and Jamaica (reggae), leading to the production of what is now reggaeton. This genre holds many connections to several aspects of hip hop, which I further detail in chapter 3. Marshall (2010) outlines reggaeton in its recent development, stating that as “the great hope of the Latin music industry, reggaeton remains a grassroots phenomenon, embraced and localized across Latin America” (p. 1).

Dance and rhythm stand as the most important defining factors of reggaeton. *Dembow*, the rhythmic pattern consistently employed in reggaeton, combines elements of duple and triple meters, forming a sense of danceable sonic and metric ambiguity. Peter Manuel and Michael Largey (2016) describe it best as an “insistent, kinetic *boom- chaboom-chick-boom-chaboom-chick*” (p. 113). Wayne Marshall (2008, p. 138) also outlines this rhythmic structure against a pattern of four, divided between a snare and kick drum (see Figure 1.1). This rhythm developed as a sonic signifier of reggaeton essential to its musical production and identification. The dance style associated with reggaeton, *perreo* (doggy style), brings together elements of salsa and hip-hop, creating an intimate dance often identified by its sexually suggestive movements.



*Figure 1.1 Dembow Transcription*

These elements set the foundation for reggaeton music, dance, and culture. The rhythm brings a kinetic and swaying beat that *perreo* mimics in its fluid and connected motions. As such, many set a fast pace for *dembow* in their music as it better accompanies the natural flow of *perreo*.

Communities across Puerto Rico employed reggaeton as a political tool against the oppression of a forced “whitened” culture caused by United States colonialist policies. Petra Rivera-Rideau (2015) describes reggaeton’s reception in Puerto Rican communities stating,

although the results may not always be the same, what reggaeton offers to all of these groups is a set of cultural practices that can be manipulated in ways that shed light on the materialities of poor, urban, and predominately nonwhite Puerto Rican communities (p. 17).

Reggaeton developed in several communities all of which employed it differently, but all used this music as an expression of place and identity outside of the dominant white culture created by colonialism. Moreover, during the rise of reggaeton within Puerto Rico, several issues arose through political denigration of the genre. Political entities within Puerto Rico created a campaign against reggaeton around the late 1990s and early 2000s to make it illegal, due to the sexually explicit content of its lyrics and close association with *perreo* (Rivera, 2009).

This campaign addressed reggaeton music videos, dance, and lyrics as pornographic influences that created a negative influence on Puerto Rican youths. The anti-pornographic campaign against reggaeton sought to keep the musical style while making the lyrics clean, filming less explicit music videos, and

removing *perreo* from its performances (Rivera-Rideau, 2015). Petra Rivera-Rideau (2015) discusses this sexuality as a representation of identity for Afro-Caribbean females in particular, writing, “the overt displays of female sexuality in reggaeton music videos became especially threatening to the continued hegemony of racial democracy since they symbolized an aspect of urban blackness that troubled the perception of Puerto Rico as a ‘white[ned]’ society” (p. 55, brackets original). Reggaeton formed a cultural sense of separation from the white oppression of colonialism still found in Puerto Rican politics, and built an Afro-Caribbean and Latinx place where people from multiple communities could express their own sense of boricuaness. With songs such as “Gasolina” [Gasoline] by Daddy Yankee (2004; reupload 2017) becoming a global hit in 2004, the island’s acceptance of this genre grew more apparent. The campaign against reggaeton eventually failed because the music surged transnationally as an expression of language, race, ethnicity, and place for Afro-Caribbean and Latinx communities around the world.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Colony: Situating Puerto Rico and the United States**

Reggaeton reflects Puerto Rico’s long history with the United States as a colonial territory, one fraught with complex situations for Puerto Ricans in several aspects of life, including the political experiences of migration, environment, and economics. The United States first took control of Puerto Rico after an invasion of the island during the Spanish-American War in 1898 (Grosfoguel, 2003).

Subsequently, the *Downes v. Bidwell* act of 1901 led to the regulation of several parts of life for Puerto Ricans as a means of imposing conformity to United States culture and ways of life. This act also started the process of othering Puerto Rico as part of, but not native to, the United States. Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos Santiago (2018) detailed many parts of the *Downes v. Bidwell* act to show issues surrounding colonial control. In their explanation, they state, “from the beginning of colonial rule. . . inhabitants of the Island. . . were to be instructed in the art of democratic self-government under ‘the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization’ and the benevolent guidance of the United States” (p. 6). Clearly, the United States took a colonialist and belittling approach toward Puerto Rico as it sought to dominate the island for political and economic gain. I consider this process described in the law as a continued attempt to Americanize the island’s people. This control gave the United States an advantage in future affairs during WWII and the Cold War era, agriculture policy, and numerous other sociopolitical situations. Moreover, ownership of the island created a relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States that led to the formation of large diasporic communities within the United States (Baker, 2002).

Even as the United States benefited from control over Puerto Rico, government officials clearly rejected the possibility of Puerto Rico’s incorporation as a state. The United States government viewed the island as a possession for political control of the “other,” rather than seeing it as a part of the nation. Acosta-Belen and Santiago (2018) outline this opposition to the island’s status as part of

the United States in quoting the *Downes v. Bidwell* act, which states, “[Puerto Rico] was not a foreign country, since it was owned by the United States; it was foreign to the United States in a domestic sense because the island had not been incorporated by the United States” (p. 9). Puerto Rico endured additional political cruelties during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the United States implemented policies that pushed for the Americanization of Puerto Rico, including required military service, implementation of English as the primary language of education, the standing of Puerto Ricans’ citizenship, and colonial control of the island’s political goals. Thus, the United States took complete control of Puerto Rico to create a form of economic benefit to the mainland United States at the expense of the island’s people (Grosfoguel, 2003). While some of these effects have dwindled in severity, such as the educational primary language, many of the original policies and complications that surround boricuas still impose severe consequences on Puerto Ricans today.

Migration to the United States from Puerto Rico took place in multiple waves of emigration caused by socioeconomic conditions on the island. Scholars called the most important of these waves the “great migration,” occurring shortly after World War II as many Puerto Ricans sought to gain the full benefits of American citizenship and achieve better socioeconomic conditions (Baker, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2003; Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). Many of the desired conditions for mainland Puerto Ricans never came to fruition due to a lack of employment opportunities resulting from United States colonialist policies.

Currently, this migration stands as the largest migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States in history; however, some speculate that the climate-caused migration resulting from Irma and Maria may soon be deemed larger than that of the great migration (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). This event was only the beginning of a complex process surrounding the migration of Puerto Ricans; it has resulted in a mass of diasporic communities in the mainland United States.

Puerto Ricans create a sense of transnationalism through both voluntary and involuntary migrations and reverse migratory actions. In recent research, scholars have sought to understand the intricate situation created for Puerto Ricans through the processes of migration, especially in terms of political othering (Aranda, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2003; Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). Elizabeth Aranda (2007) addresses this issue, stating, “the political, economic, and sociocultural links between the island and the US mainland have created, as some have argued, a nation of commuters who navigate through the landscapes of global capitalism by way of migration” (p. 2). These processes of creating transnational migration patterns brought many challenges for Puerto Ricans and created complications around identity. Aranda describes the current situation claiming,

One may argue that processes of assimilation into Anglo-American society and Puerto Rican cultural autonomy may conflict in very complicated ways here, the links and ties between the island and the colonial metropolis remain strong, transforming individuals and communities in the areas of both origin and destination. The result is a hybridity and fluidity that calls us to assess and reassess just what it means to be a Puerto Rican living in the United States (p. 137).

The transnational processes of migration for diasporic and non-diasporic communities depend largely on the socioeconomic conditions of the island, in relation to those of United States.

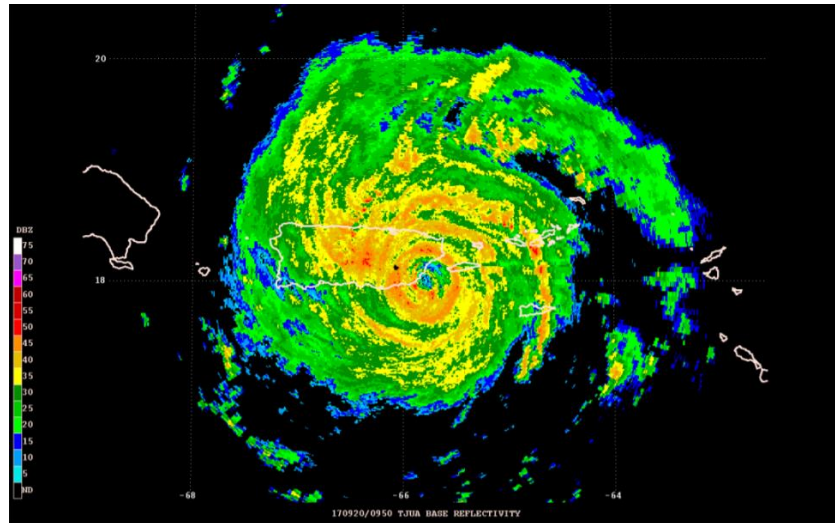
Significantly, while this growth in Puerto Rican tourism benefited local communities, its effects swiftly decayed due to the destructive forces of hurricanes Irma and Maria in August and September of 2017. According to the National Hurricane Center (NHC) (2017), Irma, the less destructive of the two hurricanes, began in West Africa on August 27, 2017. As it traveled across the Atlantic Ocean toward the eastern coast of the Americas, the storm escalated, attaining major hurricane status by September 1—halfway through its travel. Relief efforts across the Caribbean were set up on September 4—before the storm hit but did not provide enough supplies to significantly mitigate the damage still to come. While hurricane Irma did not directly hit Puerto Rico, the island did suffer the wrath of its outer extremities, causing major flooding and widespread power outages. The official NHC report describes the degradation stating,

Although Irma's eyewall passed to the north of Puerto Rico, tropical-storm-force winds and heavy rains caused widespread power outages and minor damage to homes and businesses. Weak structures on the island collapsed and numerous trees were uprooted. There was also a near-total loss of electricity and water supply for several days (p. 14).

Even though the hurricane only grazed Puerto Rico, the island's infrastructure stood no chance against the storm and its damages, particularly without aid from the United States or other nations. While this storm caused a catastrophe, it was only an introduction to the obliteration that hurricane Maria brought to the island.

Hurricane Maria similarly began off the coast of West Africa on September 12, 2017 building into a major hurricane on September 18 (NHC, 2017). Within 12 hours Maria became a category 5 hurricane and swallowed the neighboring island of Dominica. While the storm weakened as it approached Puerto Rico, it grew in overall size with disastrous effects when it hit the island. The last video footage of Maria, taken just before the radar was destroyed, shows it covering the entire island and more (NHC, 2017, p. 37) (see Figure 1.2). As Maria devoured Puerto Rico, mass destruction was inevitable, with extreme flooding, forest degradation, ruined housing areas, power outages, and many lives lost. The official NHC report shows that 65 people lost their lives to hurricane Maria; later reports would show a much higher death toll, accounting for indirect deaths caused by inadequate living conditions on the island. In their analysis of the aftermath, Robert Rivera and Wolfgang Rolke (2018) calculated roughly 3,000 deaths one month after Maria, which they determined through an algorithm that corrected misconceptions generated by the NHC's (2017) forensic methodologies. When the hurricane hit, the loss of clean water and a reliable source of electricity proved especially problematic for Puerto Rico. The NHC reports that,

Maria knocked down 80 percent of Puerto Rico's utility poles and all transmission lines, resulting in the loss of power to essentially all of the island's 3.4 million residents. Practically all cell phone service was lost, and municipal water supplies were knocked out. At the end of 2017, nearly half of Puerto Rico's residents were still without power, and by the end of January 2018, electricity had been restored to about 65% of the island (NHC, 2017, p. 7).



*Figure 1.2 Final Radar Image of Hurricane Maria*

The devastation of the island led to a massive evacuation of Puerto Rican refugees to the United States, who sought safety from these natural disasters. In this aftermath, politics surrounding Puerto Rico for diasporic and non-diasporic communities grew increasingly tense with the United States government. The island now suffers from socioeconomic difficulties, including conditions that continue to worsen from the hurricanes.

Prior to the disastrous effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria, Puerto Rico's economic status was in an extremely fragile state due to its relationship to the United States. Countless issues involved migratory problems, as well as economic displacement caused by United States policy. Stephen Park and Tim Staples (2017) describe the difficulties facing the island:

One-third of native-born Puerto Ricans now live on the U.S. mainland. In comparison to countries around the world, Puerto Rico ranks seventh in population loss. Making matters worse, Puerto Rico has an extremely low

labor participation rate, with only 40% of the adult population employed or looking for work. Together, these factors have created a vicious economic cycle in which dismal economic conditions push migration toward the mainland while population declines and undercuts economic recovery on the island (p. 16).

From this situation, a dire need developed for the United States government to establish a just and proper economic system for the island's current operations. The conditions resulted in the passing of PROMESA, the bill that mandated much more stringent control over Puerto Rico's economy by the Obama administration, which attempted to save the island from its tremendous amount of debt (Jacoby, 2017). Unfortunately, this bill led to further problems on the island, not only lowering the minimum wage, but also causing an extreme lack of funding for Puerto Rico's infrastructure, and more specifically its power grid. The final culminations of PROMESA never brought economic and social fruition to Puerto Rico, but rather demonstrated how "inconsistent federal law and policies have exacerbated Puerto Rico's debt problems" (Park & Staples, 2017, p. 16). The PROMESA bill, along with the Trump administration's complete neglect of the needs of Puerto Rico, established the foundations for the island's horrifying and disastrous experiences of hurricanes Irma and Maria.

In the face of hurricanes Irma and Maria, along with failing infrastructure and a massive accumulated debt, the island demanded foreign and internal aid from the United States. However, the Trump administration left Puerto Rico in shambles while claiming to help the island with the process of hurricane relief.

Several UN experts on human rights (UN Human Rights, 2017) severely criticized the United States' handling of hurricane aid, stating,

We call on the United States and Puerto Rican authorities to remove regulatory and financial barriers to reconstruction and recovery. All reconstruction efforts should be guided by international human rights standards, ensuring that people can rebuild where they have lived and close to their communities. Reconstruction should aim to increase the resilience of Puerto Rico's infrastructure, housing and hospitals against future natural disasters (p. 1).

A severe demand from human rights activists around the world for Puerto Rican aid made its way to our government, but the current administration took little action in supporting the United States territory.

President Donald Trump seized this situation to promote his self-image, claiming several times that he helped Puerto Rico successfully with hurricane relief. However, in most of his public statements he ignored data on the hurricane's destructive effects (Hodges, 2017). Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos Santiago (2018) assess Trump's reactions toward Puerto Rico's conditions at the time by analyzing his statements in social media and in the press. He often criticized Puerto Ricans themselves for the damages caused by the hurricanes, and their negative effect on the United States economy. Some of these reactions, affirmed his "total absence of empathy and respect for hurricane victims;" he even "joked about Puerto Rico's hurricane disaster putting the United States budget 'out of whack'" (Acosta-Belen & Carlos Santiago, p.129). In another instance, his administration guaranteed the government of Puerto Rico a 4.7 billion-dollar relief low-interest loan, which 6 months after the hurricanes had not

yet made its way to the island (Slavin, 2018). Moreover, Trump's reactions to the crisis constantly seemed unsympathetic to the plight of Puerto Ricans (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018).

Trump and his administration demonstrated a lack of responsiveness stemming from his xenophobic attitudes towards Latinx communities. This approach to Puerto Rican political ecology once again presents a grim view of the island as a commodity and not truly or culturally part of the United States. Trump continually denied the death tolls (Rivera & Rolke, 2018) that indicated over 3,000 deaths, ignoring the reality of the situation, as it would tarnish the image of his administration. Trump, upon his return from the island, tweeted that Puerto Ricans want "everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort," and continued to criticize them for expecting aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, p. 129). His jaded position and lack of care for Puerto Rico left the island's ecology and economy in shambles for all its inhabitants.

The environmental crisis forced many Puerto Ricans to migrate to the mainland United States. Refugees fled their homeland, often with no return plans due to economic disasters resulting from the hurricanes, as well as previous economic struggles due to government corruption. Acosta-Belen and Santiago (2018) analyze the situation stating, "the extent of the storm damages clearly demonstrated that the island's basic infrastructure was precarious at best," and suggest a bleak prognosis for the island's future (p. 132). While researchers lack

statistics on Puerto Rican migration in 2017 and 2018, many believe that “no-return” refugees caused by hurricane Maria will develop into the largest Puerto Rican exodus in history (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). Currently, relocating to the United States presents better socioeconomic opportunities and safer living conditions for Puerto Ricans; however, this migration challenges Puerto Ricans’ sense of community, both on the island and within the diaspora.

### **Musical, Cultural, and Environmental Engagement**

Ecomusicology developed as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of music and culture through ecocritical means. This approach dates to the work of George Herzog (1941), who suggested that then-current research failed to distinguish between sound and music within the natural world, stating that, “there seems to be no criterion for separation of the vocal expression of animals from human music” (p. 4). However, Steven Feld’s (1994) scholarship, which employed R. Murray Schaffer’s (1977) concept of the soundscape, provides a more concrete beginning to the field of ecomusicology. Feld’s work detailed how, for the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea, “the language and music of nature are intimately connected with the nature of language and music” (p. 3). Through his research concerning nature and music, Feld sought to “transform” himself “from an ethnomusicologist to an echo-muse-ecologist” (p. 3). This transformation encourages scholars to consider how ecological sounds are reflected in the music of a specific culture. In essence, music echoes the important sonic

features of a particular ecology. In this sense, Feld considers how musical processes take influence from surrounding environments in sonic production.

More recently, these theoretical approaches have gained substantial popularity with the works of Aaron Allen (2013) and Jeff Titon (2013), who focus on ecocritical framings of ethnomusicological research. Titon (2013) defines his approach as “the study of music, culture, sound, and nature in a period of environmental crisis” (p. 8). However, these works problematically encourage a “nature-based,” grassroots, or back-to-earth conception of sound studies in defining ecocritical thought. These concepts do not exist in all cultures around the world and thus complicate our studies. Allen (2013) while advocating for interdisciplinary awareness, creates highly debatable approaches for urban ecological studies. Back-to-earth ideologies often set up a dichotomy between nature and humans and generate fear of technology and urban spaces. However, this attitude ignores the importance of these urban spaces to the people that dwell within them. Therefore, my work considers urban spaces as important ecological environments that shape the cultural experience of boricuas.

Moreover, ecomusicologists must continue to reevaluate critically our approaches to this field. Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2016) criticizes common beliefs in ecomusicology—one that affirms a “recourse to the notion of nature,” and another that antithetically “reaffirms a distinction” between the human and natural (p. 109). Further, ecomusicologists often erroneously apply these premises to the study of other cultures and ways of life. Importantly, Ochoa

Gautier recognizes that separate cultures cultivate their own “knowledge and being,” in a way that “does not resonate with our own” understandings (p. 109). This means that any given viewpoint of ecological knowledge, such as climate change, does not exist as a universal concept within the field or for our informants. Within the ever-expanding interdisciplinary approaches of musicological research in science-based thought, we must continue to remember that western understanding, knowledge, and structure do not apply to all situations. Rather than forcing essentialist thought onto other cultures we must, as Ochoa Gautier (2016) suggests, increase our research on local knowledges concerning culture, music, and environment (Geertz, 1973; Feld, 2015). I entered this project with my own thoughts on climate change and environmental policy. Nonetheless, I adopt Ochoa Gautier’s (2016) guidance in my fieldwork, seeking individual ecological perspectives and local knowledge from boricuas.

In addressing sustainability, I adopt the methods of research found in the work of Mark Pedelty (2011), Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant (2016), and Aaron Allen, Jeff Titon, and Denise Von Glahn (2014), who importantly view music within the context of sustainable societies. Work in issues of sustainability often revolves around three pillars: economic, social, and environmental. However, Allen, Titon, and Von Glahn (2014) contest this three-pillar notion. Allen argues for the consideration of “aesthetics” as an additional pillar of sustainability, claiming that “put simply, aesthetics deals with philosophies of beauty, but it can be equally as complex as the terms I’ve just been discussing.

Aesthetics in sustainability encourages us to ask, ‘What kind of world do we want to sustain’” (p. 9). I challenge the notion of “we” in the sense of sustainability, as its elite foundation lies within western scientific thought. However, the “aesthetic” pillar may generally assist research in understanding culture, expression, and memory affected by socio-political and environmental issues.

I also am influenced by Mark Pedelty’s (2011) work with sustainability, which engages all four of these pillars. For example, in his discussion of popular musicians, he states, “unfortunately, far more musicians are currently seeking lucrative licensing deals than working on behalf of sustainability. The current economic model favors consumption-oriented composition and performance methods. Markets favor music that promotes, or at least ignores, environmental degradation” (p. 19). Here, Pedelty posits that the politics of the modern popular music industry force musicians away from musical activism through a complex relationship of socioeconomic environmental exceptionalism in popular music aesthetics. Other works have explored issues of the four pillars (Schippers & Grant, 2016) with local musics, researching musical expression within the contexts and conditions necessary for sustainability. I understand views on sustainability as an important factor in the Puerto Rican political state. For my work, the fourth pillar of aesthetics references reggaeton’s significance within the politics of Puerto Rico and boricua culture in a time of climate caused crisis.

## **Wayfaring the World: Ethnography of the Soundscape**

My ethnographic research, and my understanding of the reggaeton soundscape for boricuas, draws on the work of R. Murray Schaffer (1994), Tim Ingold (2011), and Steven Feld (2015). Ingold (2011) contests the premise of soundscape, a concept first defined by Schaffer (1994), viewing it as a limited model for understanding sound, nature, and human engagement within environments. The original conception of soundscape relegates sound to specific places, a premise that Ingold argues against because it takes soundscape and environment as immobile, unchanging, and isolated (Ingold, 2011). Rather, Ingold contends that sounds move through several areas and exist in many places at different times. Additionally, Ingold employs the term wayfarers to describe humans as inhabitants of a world in which we connect places along the pathways of life, instead of things locked within singular locations. As a part of this traveling process, when two lives meet, they do not connect but interweave, creating knots within our pathways. Ingold calls these combinations of lives interweaving in a process of travel the “meshwork,” which I interpret as the existence of people in an inhabitable, living, and ever-changing world. The meshwork creates a complex process of interacting peoples, all with different experiences formed through their life in creating pathways among places. Ingold summarizes his ideas, stating, “places, in short, are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement” (p. 149).

Soundscapes work by means of a similar process as they relate to our movements, and do not exist within a fixed place. Sounds, and all sensory experiences for that matter, shape our perceptions of places and pathways while we create the meshwork. They do not exist in specific locations, but rather work as part of movement as we wayfare through life. Moreover, Steven Feld (2015) extends Ingold's notions of movement for sonic environments with his concept of acoustemology. For Feld, "acoustemology conjoins 'acoustics' and 'epistemology' to theorize sound as a way of knowing. In doing so, it inquires into what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening" (p. 12). Feld works against the conception of a set soundscape; he explores ways in which cultural knowing occurs through sounds that change over time and through place. Through my reflexive ethnography, I see in my own wayfaring a meshwork that ties me to reggaeton and boricuas. Moreover, my research draws upon these concepts to further my understanding of boricua soundscape acoustemology.

### **A Pathway from Knoxville to La Perla: My Ethnographic Methods**

As part of my ethnographic research, I analyze important instances of media production and reception of reggaeton. My fieldwork has taken place both in Puerto Rico and the southeastern United States, including Tennessee and South Carolina. During my ethnography, I focused on four specific methodologies while collecting my information. In my travels, I took soundscape recordings throughout Old San Juan, conducted and transcribed interviews with people in

Puerto Rico and the United States diaspora, took notes on my participant observation at clubs and concerts, and took photographs of important locations and local graffiti.

Importantly, the connections I have made with Puerto Rican colleagues at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, notably my relationships with Carlos Hernandez-Baez and Valerie Garcia-Negron have helped me gain insight into my topic and have played a large role in my ethnography. Key interviews with Carlos and Valerie have highlighted the importance of environment in their own senses of Puerto Rican culture, expressions of self, and memories of place.

Further, I traveled to Old San Juan and Santurce, Puerto Rico, from December 31, 2018 to January 9, 2019. There I observed the physical environment in the continued aftermath of the hurricanes, attended reggaeton performances, and spoke with local musicians to further my understanding of the island's music and socioeconomic conditions, especially in Old San Juan. In my travels I mostly engaged with people living in La Perla who actively participate in reggaeton events, specifically at the concert venue La 39. While in La Perla, I worked with the Puerto Rican DJ and documentarian Tito Roman who is highly regarded in the area as a "library" for reggaeton. I also interviewed local bartender Jose Murphy from La Factoria [The Factory], the salsa bar where the "Despacito" music video (Fonsi, 2017) was partially filmed. Murphy proved extremely knowledgeable about the local club and bar life relating to reggaeton. Through these interviews, I learned more about the lives of these individuals;

they also provided me with insight into the ties between reggaeton and politics, and clarified various ways that reggaeton plays a role in coping with tragedies caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria.

My ethnography draws from my observations at clubs, formal concert venues, informal parties, and outdoor musical events where reggaeton is present through radio, streaming, and live performance. In my observations, attending reggaeton concerts provides a vital source of boricua musical engagement. As part of this research, I detail my own experiences at a local night club in Knoxville, El Pulpo Loco [The Crazy Octopus], which include observing reggaeton music and interacting with people in the local Latinx community. Further, my experience at a Yandel concert in Greenville, South Carolina, influenced my understanding of reggaeton for boricuas living in the southeastern United States diaspora. In Old San Juan, I worked with local clubs such as La Factoria, Dakiki, and La 39. These clubs hold significant meaning for locals in La Perla and greater Old San Juan; further, they have attracted large amounts of tourism, especially among reggaeton enthusiasts. Within the streets of Calle Sol, Calle Lune, Calle de San Francisco, and Calle Tanca, I conducted soundscape recordings to further demonstrate the importance of reggaeton within the local acoustemology, as well as its commentary on a political sonic environment. My observations at clubs, along with other performances, provide key sources for my ethnography in exploring reggaeton's meaning for boricuas.

My ethnographic observations of performances at concerts and clubs, as well as information gained from interviews, demonstrates expressions of identity not only through music making, but also through a process of musical participation as delineated by Thomas Turino (2008). My work employs this concept in my observations of singing along, dancing, advocacy of genre, and even the active choice of listening, all examples of participation. I rely upon the work of Aaron Fox (2004), who conceptualizes “feeling” through musical expression as a part of social domains and lexicons. He explains that feeling “connects sensory experience, embodied attitudes, and rational thought to the domain of social relations” (p. 152). Fox claims that the act of feeling within the music of a specific setting shows unique aspects of local knowledge, stating, “if you have to ask what ‘feeling’ means. . . you’ll never know, and that’s the point. ‘Feeling’ is an inchoate quality of authenticity” (p. 155). Participating in musical activities, such as the active choice to listen to reggaeton, exemplifies a type of participatory musical phenomenon in which listeners express their identity through a semiotic “feeling” of their culture.

In her work, Deborah Wong (2004) also considers aspects of participatory music making as markers of expressing identity. She questions concepts of Asian American music and preconceived ideas of what such delineations mean. To solve this dilemma, she defines her work not in terms of Asian American music, but in terms of Asian Americans *making* music, thus emphasizing a participatory nature. Using a similar contextual approach, I explore concepts of

identity for Puerto Ricans by positing my research as an understanding of boricuas engaging with music. Throughout my ethnography informants such as Carlos participate frequently with reggaeton culture, establishing it as an important part of their identity. However, Carlos' connection to reggaeton comes not from taking a role as a DJ or rapper, but rather in the active choice to listen, sing along, and dance. I learned through my participant observation at clubs such as El Pulpo Loco (in Knoxville, Tennessee) and La Vergüenza [The Embarrassment] (in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico) of the close connections between reggaeton, identity, and expression in local soundscapes. Reflexivity proves important to my work in negotiating racial relations, dangerous situations, and understanding my own feelings about reggaeton within the global soundscape (see Titon, 2008).

### **Looking Forward: Other Works in Sound, Technology, Environment, and Ethnography**

In addition to the works discussed above, several other scholars and their writings inform my current research on reggaeton and boricua identity. Researchers in the field of sound studies have proven important to me in their exploration of sound within music and culture. Significantly, Brandon LaBelle (2010), David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (2015), and Alex E. Chávez (2017) explore the politics of soundscapes in ways that have influenced my thinking, particularly in their discussions of the politics of sound. For example, LaBelle's (2010) work addresses issues of sound and place in urban settings, detailing

issues of acoustical engineering, background musics, collective and ambient sound, underground music, and others. Chávez's (2017) work explores soundscapes across several locations, specifically at *huapango arribeño* concerts, as a sonic reflection of community for Mexican migrants in the United States. Other works, like that of Novak and Sakakeeny (2015), delve deeply into the complex aspects of sound itself and its importance for research on sonic expression.

Steven Feld (2012), Jeff Tilton (2001), J. Revell Carr (2014), and Gavin Steingo (2016) have conducted ethnographies employing soundscape as a foundational frame. For example, Feld's (2012) classic ethnographic work with the Kaluli explores soundscape from an ecological approach. His work connects music to nature through taxonomies of birdsong that form an important part of Kaluli acoustemology. Steingo's (2016) ethnography, too, explores the politics of soundscapes, in this case for South African kwaito musicians affected by the legacy of apartheid policies. The acoustic environment and changing soundscape that is shaped by local and global sound becomes politicized through its reflection in the daily lives of musicians and others in Soweto. For me, these works contribute to a deeper understanding of soundscapes and the politics surrounding them. However, questions of soundscapes in motion, as I suggested earlier, still need additional attention.

In embracing new concepts from related fields, such as ecocriticism, scholars in musicology have broadened their approaches. Many researchers

relate music to the “natural” or address issues of climate change from an ecocritical perspective (see Allen & Dawe, 2016; Grimley, 2011; Ingram, 2010). Daniel Grimley (2011) takes an activist educational approach in analyzing Jean Sibelius’ tone poem *Tapiola* (1926), offering an ecological reinterpretation that promotes its performance as part of climate change education. Even though this approach takes a new outlook within the field, it still promotes a technophobic tendency often found within ecomusicological literature, as described previously.

Much scholarship, such as that of Jacques Attali (1985) and Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009), addresses issues of technologies and their involvement with music and sound (see also Greene & Porcello, 2005; Lysloff & Gay, 2003). These works show the importance of understanding the place of technology within current musical contexts. I employ these works to help better connect the bridges between ecomusicology, technology, and urban sound in my research. Others have explored music and the process of globalization (see Appadurai, 1996; Slobin, 1993; Stokes, 2004). Building from Appadurai’s (1996) work with global flows, Tim Taylor (2003), explores the relationship between the local and the global, and he “emphasizes the extent to which the local and the global are no longer distinct. . . but are inextricably intertwined” (p. 67). Rather than creating binary conditions for research, we must continue to use the methods of ethnography to explore the agency of, and subjective meanings for, our collaborators.

My work does not address issues of gender and sexuality, both of which prove important in recent developments of the reggaeton community. However, I still take a feminist approach to my ethnography, adopting methods set forward by Tricia Rose (2008) for hip-hop scholars. Her work addresses these matters and divides hip-hop scholars into two separate categories. She claims:

Those who take on sexism in hip-hop can generally be divided into two broad groups: (a) those who use hip-hop's sexism (and other ghetto-inspired imagery) as a means to cement and consolidate the perception of black deviance and inferiority and advance socially conservative and anti-feminist agendas; and (b) those liberals and progressives who are deeply concerned about the depths of the sexist imagery upon which much of hip-hop relies, but who generally support and appreciate the music, and are working on behalf of black people, music, and culture (p. 114-115).

Employing an approach similar to Rose's type "(b)," I recognize the historically misogynist tendencies of this music, but also appreciate and advocate for its use among boricuas as a source of cultural sustainability.

Research from feminist perspectives exist in some studies concerning reggaeton. Most notably, Petra Rivera-Rideau (2015) takes such an approach in researching the beginnings of reggaeton and its initial reception in the Puerto Rican soundscape. Her work presents many ways forward for how we, as reggaeton scholars, might begin to rethink our work employing a feminist lens. Rivera-Rideau's (2015) scholarship situates reggaeton studies within the same context as Rose's (2008) type "(b)" approach. While I do not directly discuss issues of gender and sexuality, I build from the work of these researchers, using their ideologies as a general guideline when conducting my ethnography.

## **One Step Forward: An Outline of Reggaeton in Ethnography**

The remainder of this thesis variously develops from the scholarship and methodologies that I have discussed here. In chapter two, I explore the long history of music, culture, and migration for Puerto Ricans in relationship to the United States. I detail musics such as jazz, salsa, hip-hop, and reggae as important influences on reggaeton with strong connections between the New York City diaspora and the island itself. Music in these communities throughout the past century expressed identity for Puerto Ricans, while also leading to the constant innovation of new genres. I show how reggaeton demonstrates boricua expression, place, ethnicity, and race with respect to the political tensions between Puerto Rico and the United States.

In chapter three I explore the continued tragic aftermath of the hurricanes in a time of rebuilding for San Juan, Puerto Rico, specifically focusing on smaller locations that experienced large amounts of destruction. In this chapter I focus on the inscription of place through graffiti and reggaeton music. In this process boricuas recreate their sense of home after the devastation of hurricane Maria. I detail visible and aural parts of my pathway that demonstrate the cultural sustainability of living in the Old San Juan. In this chapter, I reveal the importance of reggaeton in these communities and its deep connections to environment as expressed through the sonic understandings of music and culture for boricuas in affected areas.

My fourth chapter outlines the process of reggaeton as a sonic expression of identity and place in a world affected by climate change. Through interviews and music video analysis, I show how reggaeton brought aspects of ecotourism to Puerto Rico before the storms hit. However, after the hurricanes' degradation, boricuas used reggaeton as a sustainer of community and identity as they expressed their race, ethnicity, language, and national pride in Puerto Rico through this music. I also explore reggaeton as an acoustemological example of environmental expression for Puerto Ricans living on the island and within the diaspora. I specifically analyze two globalized songs, "Despacito" by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee and "Desde el Corazón" [From the Heart] by Bad Bunny, detailing their impact on local and cultural flow for boricuas in Old San Juan. This music expresses a sense of boricuaness that works against the United States' colonial rule, and demonstrates a deep acoustemology of place, identity, and environment in a time of climate-caused migration.

In chapter five, I conclude my argument, further demonstrating the importance of reggaeton within the current boricua soundscape. Working with boricuas gives deep and unique insights into the importance of reggaeton for sustainability, both on the island and in the United States. I outline how these elements may lead to further research on the connections among environment, gender, and sexuality for boricuas affected by hurricanes Irma and Maria. I suggest the importance of analyzing musical and sonic expressions of identity in ecomusicological contexts. Finally, I encourage future pathways for continuing

ethnographies concerned with acoustemology during times of climate-caused migration.

## CHAPTER II

# MUSICAL EXPRESSION OF REGGAETON: UNDERSTANDING BORICUA PLACE AND IDENTITY

### **Sonically Creating Place**

Popular musics represent expression of place and identity for cultures around the world. More specifically, popular musics from Caribbean and Latin American cultures unify these concepts and experiences in terms of immigration, colonialism, and ethnicity through the process of Latinization. I draw from Frances Negrón-Muntaner's (2004) work and consider Latinization as a term to describe the general acceptance of Latin American culture and music into the United States. For Puerto Rico, this primarily takes place through the popularization of reggaeton in the United States pop charts. As many people have immigrated from the Caribbean to the United States, performers and listeners have worked to sustain diasporic cultural expressions of pride, identity, and place through music. During the early 2000s, reggaeton swiftly grew in popularity amongst young communities on the island and in the diaspora, leading many to adopt it into the boricua soundscape as an important sonic identifier (Marshall, 2010). While most of this popularity initially existed in the cities of New York and San Juan, especially in areas of low socioeconomic status, its recent globalization beginning in 2017 reinforced its use in expressing culture, politics, and boricua identity. My ethnographic research, based in local scenes in both the southeastern United States and in San Juan, has led me to understand the

important connections between the global and local. Many performers producing music on a global scale influence local renderings of reggaeton, and provide sonic representation of local identities. Reggaeton now signifies strong expression of boricua identity and place for communities in Puerto Rico and in the diaspora, in a time of political strife surrounding colonial politics. Listening to reggaeton within the diaspora displays the importance of this music's movement through global flows as boricuas engage and express this culture even while living beyond the island.

The globalization of reggaeton brings to light several new aspects of its use throughout communities in the Americas. Martin Stokes (2004) addresses many of the issues concerning globalization of music from 1980-2004. His work details arguments on globalization from Mark Slobin and Veit Erlmann that provide theoretical frames for understanding musics in a world context. Slobin's approach adapts Arjun Appadurai's (1996) work with "scapes," and argues that no overarching structure exists for control of culture within the global system. Stokes continues his discussion of Slobin's concepts, outlining analytical methods, hybridity, politics, globalized culture, and inner culture related to mass mediated musics.

My work adopts his influential approach to global music studies, following his advice that researchers should not work in a "culture-free" mindset of musical inquiry. Rather, researchers of globalization should "stress that musical, as well as political, social, and economic, explanations exist as to why particular

practices circulate;” further Slobin advises “that any properly cultural analysis of the global music order should consider them” (p. 68). In the context of reggaeton’s globalization, understanding transnational use of this music calls for a comprehension of its socio-political contexts on both the global and local scale.

Below I detail the important musical influences on reggaeton and how specific artists in the past relate music to their identity. In doing so, I continue to draw influence from Ingold’s (2015) concept of wayfaring, taking a geographical approach as opposed to a chronological one. I show the influence of reggae from Jamaica and the importance of jazz and hip-hop in New York City to the development of reggaeton.

## **Popular Musics and Caribbean Identities: From Reggae to Reggaeton**

In the Caribbean, several popular music genres, including bomba, reggae, salsa, and many others developed from a multitude of cultures with ethnically and racially diverse communities that have changed over time (Manuel & Largey, 2016). The history of these practices shows their impact on reggaeton and a long-standing relationship between music and expression of identity for diasporic and non-diasporic Puerto Ricans. As mentioned in chapter 1, the great migration (1950s) led many Puerto Ricans to relocate to New York City in particular (Baker, 2002). The relationship between these communities created diverse musical phenomena in which Puerto Rican performers took influence from several genres, consistently generating new styles in turn. While many varieties of

expression inspired reggaeton, reggae and hip-hop took precedence in not only musical but also cultural ways (Marshall, 2010). From this development, reggaeton became an important element of boricua identity and place through music and representations of urban life.

Much of the popular music coming from these communities carries roots from several backgrounds, often resulting in hybridized genres. Reggae, one of the more famous Caribbean genres in the United States, exemplified a connection to race and ethnicity from West African origins. Bob Marley, one of the most noted reggae musicians, associated much of his musical production with expressions of Afro-Caribbean identity and place. Dick Hebdige (1987) details Bob Marley's relationship with Rastafari as a diasporic Ethiopian identity exemplified through reggae. This music created a sense of East African cultural place in Jamaica for those engaged with Rastafarian culture. Although Bob Marley was eventually driven out of Jamaica due to death threats, he continually invoked reggae as an expression of home, which he thought of as a Rastafarian Jamaica. Many of Bob Marley's performances with his band the Wailers articulated the ways the music connected to West Africa. Hebdige (1987) highlights these feelings stating, "they began wearing Ethiopian colours and growing the dreadlocks which were to become trademark of roots reggae. And the lyrics of their songs became increasingly militant and concerned with the issues of social and racial inequality" (p. 63). Bob Marley and the Wailers saw their music as a powerful tool that represents race, ethnicity, and place,

empowering them to fight conservative political oppressiveness exerted throughout the United States and Caribbean. Many musicians from the Caribbean use their music in the same sense as Bob Marley. Historically, music from Puerto Rico assisted Puerto Ricans in sustaining their sense of self in a time of cultural persecution caused by the colonial politics of the United States.

In the early 20th century, a large diasporic community of Puerto Rican immigrants emerged in New York City as a result of the great migration, making it a sonic hub for the performance of Puerto Rican popular musics. Ruth Glasser (1998) details the complexities of racial and ethnic identities for Puerto Ricans living in New York city at the time stating,

the way Puerto Ricans made meaning of their music and musicians, and how they decided what was an authentic or traditional expression, varied between social groups as well as individuals, always in a dialectic with the concrete conditions under which the music was produced. Music in Puerto Rico was subject to foreign and commercial influences as well as differences in race, class, and regional development (p. 17).

Puerto Ricans living in New York City experienced racial and ethnic oppression as they inscribed new communities and life in a place far from home. Glasser (1998) details the idiosyncratic qualities of musical expression for Puerto Ricans living in New York City, and demonstrates the importance of popular music to identification of race, ethnicity, and reestablishment of place for several of New York's Puerto Rican communities through musics such as jazz, bomba, and several others. Feelings of oppression carried over to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and played an important role in the relationship between boricua identity and hip-hop.

Performers employed hip-hop as a cultural expression against oppression from political powers in New York City during the 1970s. As I will discuss further in chapter 3, hip-hop culture in the past broke down into four elements: graffiti, breakdancing, rapping, and DJing (Rose, 2008). During this time, several rappers gained prominence who used their music as a form of protest and cultural representation. Writing on the rapper Afrika Bambaataa and his creation of “The Zulu Nation,” George Lipsitz (1994) noted that Bambaataa named the Zulu nation after the 1964 film *Zulu* (dir. Cy Endfield), which tried to depict the Zulu people as “exotic” and “primitive” peoples that acted “as predatory savages opposed to the ‘civilizing mission’ of the British empire” (p. 26). However, for Bambaataa, the Zulu represented something completely different and positive for his community. Bambaataa used this name to create cultural ties to the past and as an expression of identity and place moving forward. George Lipsitz (1994) continued, “in his eyes, the Zulus were heroic warriors resisting oppression. He used their example to inspire his efforts to respond to racism and class oppression in the U.S.A.” (p. 26). Bambaataa’s notion of a “Zulu Nation” reached out to multiple communities within inner city neighborhoods, including diasporic Puerto Rican ones. These communities used Bambaataa’s music to fight political powers and take pride in race, ethnicity, and culture threatened by western thought.

Puerto Ricans living in New York City found further musical expression of self in the development of hip-hop and rap, contributing to this music and

culture's development. Musics found within inner city neighborhoods of New York City mixed elements of African diasporic and Puerto Rican cultures. Juan Flores (1998) describes this interaction in relationship to hip-hop communities stating,

. . . break and rap rhythms, with all their absorption of intervening and adjoining styles, remain grounded in African musical expression. They are further testimony to the shared cultural life of African-descended peoples in New York City, which for the past generation, at least, has centered on the interaction of Puerto Ricans and African Americans (p. 61).

This connection of Puerto Ricans to hip-hop communities produced several musicians who brought the Spanish language into rap. TNT, also known as Tomas Robles, was born in Puerto Rico and migrated with his family to New York City at a young age. His music (primarily in the 1980s and 90s) protested many politics involving Puerto Rico and its relationship to the United States. Juan Flores (1998) describes TNT's expression of Latino identity against these politics and translates a sample of his lyrics as an example:

Puerto Rico, a beautiful island where there are pretty roses, plantains, bananas, and root vegetables, Goya seasoning gives the food flavor and who cooks better than my own aunt? But the government is well armed, trying to convert it into a state it's better to leave it free. . . Puerto Rico don't sell yourself (p. 137).

Here, TNT expresses his sense of identity, language, culture, and place through rap as a musical art form tied to his community. The use of rap and hip-hop techniques demonstrate ways of expressing place and identity for diasporic Puerto Ricans throughout New York as the struggles of life for Puerto Ricans in the United States have continued.

During the 1990s, urban artists both in Puerto Rico and in the diaspora employed hip-hop as a musical expression of identity (Flores, 1998). This time period helped shape the now strong connection between urban culture and boricua identity, specifically conceptualized in opposition to the United States. In 1995, Joel Bosch, also known as DJ Taino, wrote and produced a song that became the anthem for boricuas across the world (Martinez, 2012). This song, “Yo Soy Boricua” consists mostly of a repetitive chant with the lyrics “Yo soy boricua, pa que tú los sepas” in a call-response format, roughly translating to “I am boricua, just so you know” (all translations by the author unless otherwise indicated). This chant grew in popularity throughout boricua urban communities and became a standard part of the lexicon in Old San Juan, expressing identity and place at reggaeton musical events. This influence from hip-hop of expressing identity, place, and calls for freedom against oppression extended into many global manifestations and representations of this music.

Reggaeton artists use their music to shape a sense of identity, place, and acceptance not found in the political policies of the US. One of the more famous reggaeton songs in the United States, “Mi Gente” [My People] by J Balvin and Willy William (Balvin, 2017), demonstrates this cultural expression. The song inspired the United States superstar Beyoncé to join the two artists in covering the song, not only because of its popularity but also because of the lyrical content and its unifying meaning. This collaboration brought additional visibility to the song. In the opening, J Balvin sings the lyrics “Mi música no discrimina a nadie

así que vamos a romper” [“My music does not discriminate, so we are going to tear it up.”] The lyrics address what J Balvin calls “my people,” describing pride in community, for cultures found throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and their diasporas. But such popularized music also applies to more local levels, especially for Puerto Rico.

For instance, the song “Despacito” makes clear reference to Puerto Rico, especially at the end (Fonsi, 2017). The music video, which I discuss in detail in chapter 4, is completely shot in La Perla; it demonstrates pride in Puerto Rico through lyrical reference, imagery, *perreo*, *dembow*, and several other elements of cultural expression, which also exist throughout communities in Puerto Rico and the southeastern United States. It is from these global examples, specifically the music videos, that I grew interested in the role of such popular music on local scales. Throughout my fieldwork, I found that boricuas express their identity through reggaeton at clubs, concerts, and the use of radio and streaming services in both public and private settings. These aspects became apparent to me both in Puerto Rico and in Knoxville, Tennessee.

### **Reggaeton in the Knoxville Soundscape: El Pulpo Loco and a Sense of Boricua Place**

Working in Knoxville, Tennessee during the months of September and October of 2018 led me to a club named El Pulpo Loco [The Crazy Octopus], located in the southern part of the city. My personal encounters at this club display several issues surrounding identity and diaspora, especially with regard

to political tensions, xenophobia, and the Latinization of the United States.

Situated on the side of the road, the club has darkly tinted, full-length windows, which makes it difficult to see inside. The windows display various decorations including a graffiti-like depiction of an octopus holding beer bottles and cooking knives (see Figure 2.1; all photos by the author unless otherwise indicated).

Upon my first night trying to enter, I followed another person to the door, hoping to find some confidence going in. However, when I made it to the threshold, a worker let in the man in front of me, but immediately shut the door in my face and bolted it. This instance of denied entrance occurred several times subsequently, creating a personal struggle and research question as to whether I would ever attend El Pulpo Loco. During my fourth attempt to enter, the staff allowed me in with a \$20 fee and questioned my presence there. Many staff members later expressed to me how uncomfortable they were with a young white male entering their club, revealing prevalent fears of white males appropriating, oppressing, and policing the Latinx community within El Pulpo Loco. While many attendees now feel comfortable with my presence, issues surrounding the inequities and politics of race severely affected my work.

Similar issues arose during my ongoing interviews with UTK students Carlos and Valerie, who expressed their fears within the United States. Carlos (personal conversation, 10-29-2018) specifically told me about an incident when he attended a church in Knoxville during his first year living in the United States. He detailed how many members of the congregation welcomed him but also



*Figure 2.1 El Pulpo Loco*

made it clear that he was to speak English while at the church. His experience shows the strength of xenophobic attitudes based on language. Returning to the work of Alex E. Chávez (2017), I see the church that Carlos attended as attempting to “police” his life based on language as a prerequisite to “welcome” him into their community. These xenophobic situations create fears for the Latinx community in the southeastern United States, mostly in social interactions with whites who, in their experience, represent oppression.

In addition, El Pulpo Loco presented an interesting example of reggaeton exerting a Latinizing influence on the United States. Many times at the club, reggaeton collaborations between United States and Puerto Rican performers sounded throughout the night. This shows an important factor of reggaeton’s usage as a political tool for the boricua community in the southeastern United States. Such collaborations of performers demonstrate a claiming of boricua place within the United States soundscape. One such example sounded when a DJ played the song “Taki, Taki” by DJ Snake, Ozuna, Cardi B, and Selena Gomez. International collaborations such as “Taki, Taki” show a growing acceptance of Spanish language into the United States soundscape. Further, its popularity at El Pulpo loco reveals the Latinx community integrating such places as home. Intriguingly, in some circles the song would have negative associations due to its sexually explicit lyrical content, often referring to anal sex. Yet in this case, as seen in other instances of reggaeton’s popularity, the song’s role as an emblem of Latinx identity transcends the controversial content. This moment

provided an instance in which members of the Latinx community employ these collaborative songs to express race, identity, and language within the United States, while also Latinizing its soundscape.

During other portions of my fieldwork, I found that these moments of sharing cultures were also happening among my informants and their friends. Boricuas in Knoxville like Valerie often find joy in sharing their culture with those in the mainland United States. For her (personal conversation, 10-26-2018), this happened with the song “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee (2017); she described an interaction involving a friend of hers and this song, having shown her friend the music video weeks before its popularization in the United States. Soon after, her friend played it for her on the radio here in Knoxville and Valerie experienced shock in hearing it. She described this experience in our interview saying,

I was surprised that for the first time I was hearing Spanish music in Tennessee. It was really challenging for me, but I was really happy to share this music. I mean, the music brings us together, so we can all enjoy this culture (10-26-2018).

She was validated to hear the song and the inclusion of Spanish music in the United States, especially a song that represented Puerto Rican place and culture. Valerie’s experience, as well as my own at El Pulpo Loco, show a Latinization of the United States soundscape taking place largely through reggaeton. However, while many Puerto Ricans take pride in culture and music within the United States, they still express doubts regarding the spaces they live

in, including fears of potential hate crimes due to xenophobia of the Latinx “Other.”

During my interviews I wanted to better understand the difference between using the identifiers “boricua” and “Puerto Rican” from the perspectives of my informants. Carlos and I spent a lot of time conversing about his love of Puerto Rico’s peoples, food, environments, and cultures. His descriptions painted wonderful pictures of a beautiful island with important personal meaning. With regard to boricuaness as an identity, Carlos discussed his interpretation of the word:

IG: There's Puerto Rican and there's boricua. For you is there a difference between what those two things mean? And when you use those words, in what contexts do you think you use them separately?

CH: That's the thing, they are not separate. It's the same thing because what boricua means is, our indigenous name of the island is Boriquen. Boricua just refers to someone from Boriquen, from the island. Puerto Rico is our colonized name by the Spanish, and that's where Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican come from. So, when we say, 'where my boricuas,' we are just saying we are from Puerto Rico. It is still a call for freedom. I didn't think about it this way until now but it's really a call for freedom from before the colonial days (10-29-2018).

Carlos presented his feelings on the status of Puerto Rican culture with a grim outlook. He feels that boricua identity, for himself as well as others, slowly disappears everyday due to the conditions imposed on the island by the United States. When I asked him about his identity he said, “we don't have an identity right now. Our identity is pretty much in our music” (10-29-2018).

In our conversation, Carlos detailed the importance of music in his expression of identity as a boricua living in the United States. As we discussed,

an aspect of this call for freedom often occurs at reggaeton events where the Puerto Rican flag is displayed. In many cases, boricuas will dance with the Puerto Rican flag as an expression of cultural freedom separate from the United States. I encountered this phenomenon at a reggaeton concert in Greenville, South Carolina during October 2018 at the Bon Secours Wellness Arena. This performance was to feature reggaeton performers Yandel and De La Ghetto. While many were excited about this night of live reggaeton, it ended in a dangerous situation. Although both Yandel and De La Ghetto were in attendance and made themselves temporarily visible to the audience, they refused to take the stage after learning the concert was not sold out. A riot ensued. The fans' frustration demonstrates the importance of these reggaeton performers and their music in their lives. While the show headliners did not take the stage, the opening acts, including rappers and DJs, did perform for those who stayed at the concert.

Moreover, at this concert, the sounds of DJs remixing reggaeton hits prevailed in the air as many danced the night away, often in the *perreo* style. The break-up song "Te Boté" [I threw you out] (Flow La Movie, 2018), a collaboration of Ozuna, Bad Bunny, Nicky Jams, and others, all from Puerto Rico, energized the crowd into song and dance. Directly in front of me, a man started waving a Puerto Rican flag and dancing. As a participant at this concert, I also reflected upon my work with Carlos; his comments rang true in this moment. Both Carlos' understanding of the term boricua, and my own experience at the Yandel

performance, show the importance of reggaeton as an aspect of boricua identity within the United States soundscape. The most significant part of expressing boricuaness for Carlos is participating in music from Puerto Rico. He described music as a sustainer of his identity stating, “with America, we’re nothing. You know, our culture, it’s slowly dying with our people and the only thing sustaining our identities is our music right now for sure. That, I can promise you that” (10-29-2018).

Yet, Carlos initially disliked reggaeton, calling it “ghetto,” “violent,” and “degrading music.” His outlook on this music changed when he came to the United States and felt a need to claim his boricua identity in a new place. As he spoke about the role of reggaeton in his life, Carlos said,

when I came to the States and I started like missing home, believe me I would blast reggaeton. Blast it on my speakers, on my phone, or whatever. It was like I need something from home. So yeah, that’s when I realized its part of our culture (10-29-2018).

Valerie (personal conversation, 10-26-2018) also spoke highly of reggaeton as a part of her creation of Puerto Rican place; she talked about the artists she mostly listens to, such as Yandel and Maluma. When I asked her how she felt listening to reggaeton, she described music by these artists as a sonic memory of Puerto Rico explaining, “I feel like, ‘Oh I’m back home. I feel young again’” (10-26-2018). This music recreates a sense of Puerto Rican place as well as boricua identity for those living in the diaspora. While some listeners may not connect to the lyrical content found in reggaeton, feelings experienced from its sonic presence provide a musical signifier of boricua self.

Puerto Rico's migratory relationship with the United States grows in complexity every day in response to harsher laws that restrict the island from socioeconomic growth (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). These complex waves of migration contribute to what Tim Ingold (2011) deems the meshwork, where people wayfare to new places and interweave their lives. In these moments, musical participation displays facets of boricua feeling, revealing how boricuas engage with reggaeton in the diaspora (see Turino, 2008; Fox, 2004). These aspects of feeling help create a sense of place and boricua identity that conveys a desire for freedom for Puerto Ricans, such as Carlos and Valerie, living in the United States diaspora during a time of extreme political tension between these governments. I found through my observations and informants in San Juan, that many of the same feelings are held and expressed by locals in urban settings.

### **Out to the Island: Boricua Identity in La Perla and Old San Juan**

Reggaeton forms a large portion of the soundscape in Old San Juan, especially in areas such as Plaza de Armas, Calle Luna, and Calle Sol. This main walking area and two busy streets are found in the extremities of Old San Juan near La Perla and are sites of much musical night life. In these areas, a mixture of sounds resonates throughout the streets, exemplifying the diverse musics and cultures found in this community. The area embraces many features of hip-hop culture, mostly in the form of graffiti. Numerous streets act as public artistry sites, and several of the businesses here also have dance, DJing, and

sometimes live rappers. In this sense, these places are areas of remembrance for those in the diaspora as well as influences on inscriptions of boricua space.

Many areas display large Puerto Rican flags through different forms of street art. Walking through the streets of Old San Juan and La Perla, I often saw political messages displayed as graffiti on walls, houses, and streets. In reggaeton culture, the importance of artistic expression through graffiti proves similar to that of hip-hop (Rose, 2008). As musicians employ reggaeton to sonically inscribe their boricua spaces, artists physically inscribe these same areas with graffiti. Much of the graffiti I saw in Old San Juan addressed political tensions with the United States and called for pride in boricua identity. For me, one of the most intriguing works of street art I saw was located on Calle Tanca above La Perla; it states, “Welcome to the oldest colony” (see Figure 2.2). With this piece, the only work written in English on the main sidewalk, the artist pointedly critiques oppressive policies, especially addressing this message to tourists from the United States who often traverse this area. Many other pieces acclaim identity through comments such as “100% Boricua” (see Figure 2.3) and “Promesa ¡es! Pobreza” [PROMESA is Poverty!] (see Figure 2.4), the latter articulating a clear attack on the Obama Administration law that put many economic pressures on Puerto Rico as described in chapter 1. Much of this art directly works to form boricua conceptions of place and targets the United States as an evil political entity that ostensibly promotes images of freedom and liberty, but only provides oppression and modern colonization.



*Figure 2.2 Welcome to the Oldest Colony*



Figure 2.3 Boricua 100%



*Figure 2.4 PROMESA is Poverty*

These artworks also served as warning signs for those entering La Perla, an extremely impoverished community within Old San Juan. Similar to my encounters at El Pulpo Loco, the politics of race played a large role in my reception in the La Perla community. This comes not only from an association between whiteness and the oppression of Latinx people, but also from the connections between whites and the police force. La Perla's urban community accrues much of its income from a large drug trade that takes place through a strict set of rules (Urban, 2015). Coming into the barrio, one can smell the memorable scents of urine and salt water while also hearing the daily sounds of urban life. During my several trips into the area, men guarding the entrances always questioned me, wondering if I desired entry in order to obtain marijuana; my presence there to learn about music seemed more unusual than a trip for drugs. In two instances, I questioned whether feelings regarding my presence in the community would change or if I would ever really feel safe. In one unfortunate event, I happened upon a drug deal in which the group saw my observational position and note taking. They immediately began chasing me through the streets in an attempt to scare me out, possibly permanently. The next night I decided to try meeting people again; however, a man engaged me in a fist fight when I took a picture of the reggaeton club I was visiting. In this moment some people broke up the fight and I was asked to leave in order to avoid further escalating the situation. These moments brought fear into my fieldwork

experience as such fragile situations may end in volatility and violence. However, I found encouragement to continue working in speaking with Tito Roman.

In a personal conversation with Tito, a local DJ in San Juan and one of my informants (1/6/2019), he notified me of a public reggaeton concert occurring in La Perla at a concert venue known as La 39, that he felt I must attend no matter the danger. This outdoor venue on an open street of La Perla holds a long history with reggaeton according to Tito. Standing as the only public concert venue in La Perla itself, the stage of La 39 has offered many early reggaeton artists around San Juan the opportunity to perform and promote the genre. He immediately showed me the flyer providing the concert title “Perreo, Perreo” (see Figure 2.5) spelled backwards with a list of some featured musicians. In attending the event, I gained a stronger presence within the community and became a friendly face with several locals. By participating in dances, such as *perreo*, I slowly shifted my image as an outsider, gaining positive reception and increased acceptance of my presence. During the concert, the performer who went by the name Alfredo Mania led the “Yo soy boricua” chant several times in between songs.

The group often played background music of globalized reggaeton, such as “Mi Gente” (Balvin, 2017) while Alfredo improvised over top. The band consisted of a small group of musicians: Alfredo the rapper, a drummer, a saxophonist, and a keyboardist. The band offered a novel interpretation of the original, which features a brassy electronic loop, *dembow* percussion, and sung vocals. Here several differences were apparent, such as Alfredo’s decision to rap



Figure 2.5 "Perreo, Perreo"

instead of sing. The main *dembow* rhythm was set by the drummer, alternating between the kick and snare drums to keep a kinetic pulse. The saxophonist mimicked the electronic sounds found in the original song, while the keyboardist played mostly chords on off-beats for the reggae feel. The live sound was striking to me, as it changed the inflection of what were originally computerized sounds. Meanwhile, the larger soundscape was filled with conversation, people singing along, loud cars, and occasional fireworks. This venue connected sound, dance, and chant to boricua identity and globalization.

Overall, my experiences in La Perla revealed that boricua culture reflects many aspects of reggae and hip-hop through graffiti, breakdancing, MCing, DJing, and using legal and illegal substances. These activities pertaining to reggaeton create a boricua place that protests the injustices of colonialism and western thought imposed by the United States; the culture of reggaeton shapes their feelings of pride in race, ethnicity, and place.

Popular musics across the Caribbean formed outlets of expression for many communities and peoples both local and diasporic. In recent years, as reggaeton developed into a global genre, it grew into a form of cultural expression for these communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As Puerto Ricans still struggle in sociopolitical situations involving the colonialism of the United States, music provides a way to demonstrate identity and place. For Afro-Caribbean and Latinx Puerto Ricans around the world, reggaeton provides a sense of cultural home, sociopolitical power against colonialism, pride in

language, and connection of race and ethnicity to the island, both for inhabitants of Puerto Rico and those within the diaspora.

## CHAPTER III

### MEMORY, MEMORIALIZATION, AND INSCRIPTION OF SPACE

#### **Claiming Space: Negotiating Home**

Puerto Rico's ecological and cultural spaces have rapidly metamorphosized throughout the past century as the land and its people have adjusted to new technologies, a shifting ruling political body, and recently, the extreme effects of climate change. Spanish colonial rule over the island vastly affected Puerto Rico's ecology by creating new infrastructures that delineated the boundaries of communities. These implementations appear in the design of barrios such as La Perla, which is sheltered from the rest of Old San Juan by fortress walls (see Figure 3.1) (Urban, 2015). In recent years, people living in these areas adapted surrounding colonial structures as symbols of Puerto Rican history and pride, rejecting their imperial implications of a colonial past. In Old San Juan, the environment is created from a mixture of colonial infrastructure, native ecological life, and the use of modern technologies, all of which define this unique space in the everyday life of boricuas.

However, ecological disaster swiftly changes landscapes and soundscapes, erasing in the physical world what once existed, moving it into the memory of those who lived there (Silvers, 2018). Hurricanes Irma and, more importantly, Maria carved a path of destruction for the island, leaving a wake of death, ecological degradation, and permanent damage to long-standing



*Figure 3.1 Colonial Walls*

infrastructures, including many local homes. During this time of post-natural-disaster life, boricuas redefined their space through remembrance of places—both experienced and imagined—from before the hurricanes, thus shaping their continued claiming of a Spanish and nativist past.

As boricua, Puerto Ricans are recreating these spaces destroyed by the hurricanes through local participation in hip-hop. The re-inscription of a given place proves common in much of hip-hop's history for oppressed communities in the United States. Tricia Rose's (1994) work on the urban setting and hip-hop performers, artists, and dancers, details the complex ways in which people have reclaimed space and used it as symbol of pride. Rose describes this process, stating,

Hip-hop replicates and reimagines the experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates urban space through sampling, attitude, dance, style, and sound effects. Talk of subways, crews and posses, urban noise, economic stagnation, static and crossed signals leap out of hip-hop lyrics, sounds, and themes. Graffiti artists spray painted murals. . . inscribing their otherwise contained identities on public property (p. 22).

Rose continues to describe how other elements of hip-hop have animated a claiming of urban space for African Americans, specifically in the ways that breakdancing mimics postindustrial life, DJs create an "open air" urban sound, and rappers give voice to a community's expression of self. People within these urban places employ these elements of hip-hop, such as rap and graffiti, to claim a space that originally represented their oppression by a dominant white society. Even in their destruction, these spaces become home for those who re-inscribe, reimagine, and remember them as an integral part of their community and

identity. Similarly, boricuas living in Old San Juan use the same elements to reclaim their current urban spaces.

Thus, boricua space does not necessarily mean set locations, such as Old San Juan or La Perla, but rather implies areas in motion that represent where boricuas claim a cultural home. In obtaining a space for the contemporary self and cultural expression, boricuas simultaneously long for a modern connection to an indigenous identity, complicating how this space exists. This boricua space thus occurs in multiple levels and in everchanging motion, in ways that concord with Ingold's (2015) notion of the meshwork. These indigenous, Spanish, and United States spaces all mix together as an imagined Latinx and boricua place (Flores, 2000). Further, these imagined spaces exist as both indigenous and colonial versions of communities throughout the island based on real infrastructures. In his work, Kyle Mays (2018) discusses hip-hop within Native American reservations as an important expression of the indigenous and urban self. In a similar sense, boricuas have reclaimed their native roots through reimagining the Spanish language and colonial space of their ancestors as home and boricua through reggaeton.

Many scholars in recent years have sought to understand the relationship between climate change and popular music. Mark Pedelty (2011) outlines the close relationship that popular musics hold to the current environmentalist movement. In his work, he delineates a problematic music industry that works within the confines of white governmental systems that continually ignore the

severe consequences of climate change. These environmentalist folk and rock musicians promote a movement of sustainability for many major countries around the world. Other work on sustainability in music (Schippers & Grant, 2016) often focuses on culture and musical expression in times of environmental crisis. These approaches seek to show that, even during periods when communities lack economic, social, and environmental sustainability, they create a strong sense of cultural sustainability by memorializing the past (Allen, Titon, & Von Glahn, 2014).

Reggaeton performers helped bring Puerto Rican politics to light within the continental United States during a time of crisis for local communities. This music interacts in multifaceted ways with Puerto Rican politics, socioeconomic conditions, environmentalism, cultural representation, and expression of place. In the face of hurricanes Irma and Maria and their aftermath, reggaeton represents memory, memorialization, and sustained cultural identity for Puerto Ricans both on the island and within the diaspora. Reggaeton expresses the acoustemology of local environment and ecology for the island's musicians; in a time of rebuilding from the devastation of hurricanes Irma and Maria, I wayfare through several aspects of Puerto Rican environment, seeking boricua knowledge of sonic space and its role in expression and memory. Reggaeton culture takes on new meaning for Puerto Ricans who are displaced from their home and long for sustainable conditions on the island through freedom from United States colonial powers. During this journey, I encountered the intrinsic claiming of colonial space

for boricuas living in areas like La Perla. Graffiti and music play an important role in molding such places. After the destruction of the hurricanes, many still struggle with the mental and physical damages of Maria, longing to re-inscribe and memorialize their home through reggaeton culture.

## **Locating the Colonial Past as the Boricua Present**

Long-lasting colonial structures on the island, such as the old Spanish fortresses, still shape the milieu of daily life for boricuas living in Old San Juan. During early colonial years, people on the island of Puerto Rico constructed many places that delineated people within a caste-like system. This hierarchy was mostly developed during the time of the Spanish missionary movement on the island, known as the San Juan Bautista, roughly from 1439–1800. During this era, Spanish colonizers began to fortify the island into a military post with San Juan at its center (Flores, 2010). The Spanish also started to run a large portion of the West African slave trade through Puerto Rico, creating an extremely diverse population not seen on the island before. Lisa Pierce Flores (2010) describes the effects of this diversification stating, “individuals of African descent became the majority ethnicity among Puerto Ricans by the 1530s, especially once Europeans began leaving the island to pursue opportunities presented by the discovery of rich gold reserves in Mexico, Central America, and South America” (p. 37). While the population grew, the existing colonial infrastructure forced a divide amongst its peoples, leading to the creation of barrios (Arreola, 2004). Barrio life persisted throughout the island and specifically delineated a

caste system within the communities of what is now Old San Juan. It is these specific constructions of colonial barrios from the 16<sup>th</sup> century that would shape life events for many boricuas, as seen during the United States invasion of the 1890s.

The complexities of Puerto Rico's history with colonialism complicate many of the political tensions felt around the island today. Mariano Negrón-Portillo (1997) explains this history as a fight against the Spanish regime that previously ruled the island. In his work, he discusses how many Puerto Ricans felt that the United States' attack provided a chance to participate in political decisions concerning the island. He posits that,

the sociopolitical context created by the United States' invasion had immediate effects on various social groups on the island. These groups saw the military conflict as an opportunity to assume a political role long denied by the authoritarian Spanish regime (p. 41).

However, these ideas swiftly changed as United States policies went into effect throughout the island to dominate its people. The United States acted to force the Puerto Rican people not only into a political submission, but also into a cultural one. Negrón-Portillo (1997) details this further, stating,

from the time of the invasion of 1898, the government of Puerto Rico made it very clear that the goals of the Puerto Rican elite had to be subordinated to United States interests. Hence, the island was to be rapidly integrated—although on an unequal footing—with the ruling state (p. 46).

In this process, the United States began its attempt to force a dominant white cultural elite upon the island's people. However, this attempt failed as Puerto

Ricans reclaimed their indigenous and Spanish identities against these controlling political powers.

Some areas, such as Old San Juan, still bear the marks of Spanish colonialism and have implemented them as a part of daily life from the surrounding environment. The streets of Old San Juan completely comprise cobblestone laid by the Spanish during the building of the city. Many of the infrastructures in this area still stand from the time of their original colonial creation, but have changed in color due to many locals painting their houses and businesses a variety of bright and vivid shades. The buildings show very few signs of modern refurbishment to these historically Spanish environments, which integrate deep aspects of urban life into a colonial space.

One such example is found in cruising the city. Many boricuas ride in their cars through these historic streets, playing music with their windows down as they traverse old cobblestone roads. In these moments, a temporal divergence of place, space, and identity occurs. The modernity of sound systems in claiming space acoustically (see LaBelle 2010) converges with a colonial history that represents the oppression of the same people who own it. Moreover, it shows how boricuas take pride in many aspects of their Spanish and indigenous heritage as these areas become home within the context of a new political setting. This entails how boricuas use reggaeton in a sonic perpetuation throughout the city to delineate their space, while also claiming what was once a colonial infrastructure as boricua architecture.

One key area that represents a boricua delineation of space is the barrio La Perla. A space originally created to oppress its people by a Spanish ruling regime, La Perla has transformed into an area of boricua culture that articulates itself in opposition to the United States as a ruling body. As a barrio, La Perla demonstrates the long-standing infrastructure of colonialism found throughout all of San Juan (Urban, 2015). The structures of Old San Juan's colonial fortress physically confine La Perla's people between stone walls and the rocky shores of the island's northern coast (see Figure 3.2). However, the ways in which locals reclaim these spaces show a crucial part of identity and inscription of a cultural place. David Diaz (2012) details the importance of architectural structures in the process of creating communities and spaces, stating, "architectural design will re-create community atmosphere in which civic society will directly engage itself on the street, enriching and enhancing everyday life in the city" (p. 29). During my travels, I observed boricuas claiming these colonial spaces largely through hip-hop culture.

As discussed previously, the use of graffiti permeates the streets of La Perla and Old San Juan. The islanders in the reggaeton community use this artistic style to inscribe this space as home. However, many artists recognize the colonial implications inherent within the areas that they choose for their displays. During my conversation with Tito, a local DJ and filmmaker in Old San Juan, we discussed the standing imprint of colonialism in Old San Juan:

IG: So, tell me about your experience living in the area. How does the space feel to you?



*Figure 3.2 Overlook of La Perla*

TR: Well we have a real problem in this area. I encourage the young people to pay attention to our history because we have a problem here. We are still a colony, and really, have always been a colony. First, we are a colony for Spain, and now for the United States, but we are still living in these traditional colonial homes [Here Tito is talking about the homes left by the Spanish still being used in Old San Juan]. (1/6/2019)

However, as we continued to talk, Tito also revealed his fonder experiences of this area, and his love for his home, its spaces, and cultures. Tito described in detail his experiences in youth as a part of the reggaeton movement, and his claiming of a boricua identity and space:

They say that it was bad music, and that it did nothing but represent the war in the streets, all of them. It meant so much more to us, you know? Because we fought for that sound, we fought for that art, we fought to have the rights we deserved in these areas, and honestly, we are still fighting. But what you have to know is that this music was the manifestation of many young people that came from the projects and came from barrios and came from the ‘bad’ neighborhoods. I came from the poor people of Puerto Rico. So, what they represent in the music isn’t the violence, but is what they need in their neighborhoods just to survive the conditions set up by your colonial domination. So that’s very important to know that history, and to know that it is ours now. Our art says so and our music says so. You can take from us all you want. You can take our money, our freedoms, really anything, but you cannot take our culture or our community. (1/6/2019)

Tito’s vivid response details his interpretation of reggaeton and its importance in his longing for Puerto Rican freedom from the United States. Intriguingly, he points out “your colonial domination.” For me, this means the United States overall, but notably shows his view of me, whether it’s intentional or not, as a white male embodying United States governmental oppression. It is through artwork, such as graffiti, reggaeton performances, and sonic happenings that boricuas re-inscribed these colonial spaces, such as La Perla, as home. They

claim these areas as a cultural space that can no longer be taken from them by any colonial powers. However, political authorities and their oppressive powers did not form boricuas' central concern in recent years. Rather, the destruction caused by forces of climate change reshaped the way they now see this space and the ecology surrounding them.

### **Maria and Her Wrath: Destruction of Space**

While hurricane Irma did hit the island of Puerto Rico, it was fairly weak and only covered a portion of the island, thus becoming primarily a precursor to the events of hurricane Maria (NHC, 2017). During the aftermath of hurricane Maria, the response from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) offered little more than tragically poor planning for the horrible conditions to come (Park & Staples, 2017). The response of the Trump Administration and FEMA to hurricane Maria left the island's people with an unsustainable situation and no proposed solutions for moving forward. Trump's administration constantly degraded the Puerto Rican people, and blamed them for the conditions caused by the hurricane; further, when asked for 94 billion dollars to repair the estimated 95 billion dollars in damage, the administration authorized only 5 billion to begin relief efforts (Santiago & Acosta-Belen, 2018). FEMA's response also lacked the proper attention that hurricane Maria's aftermath demanded. Daniel Farber (2018) outlines several aspects of FEMA's reaction to Puerto Rico's conditions by comparing it to other hurricane response efforts. He states that,

two of the hallmarks of a successful disaster response from the public's perspective were that: (1) 'few if any' remained without adequate shelter, food or water after twenty-four hours, and (2) electric power was restored to nearly everyone within thirty-six hours. Judged by those standards, the response to Hurricane María was a resounding failure (p. 759).

This situation occurred throughout the island, affecting many of its people, businesses, and diasporic communities with strong attachments to the island itself. At the time of my fieldwork, over a year had passed since the destruction of hurricane Maria, supplying plenty of time for FEMA to make relief efforts complete. Nonetheless, in my travels, the damage of horrible climate-caused disasters remained apparent.

The impact of the hurricanes brought very difficult social and economic situations to those living on the island. In one of my interviews with Murphy (Personal conversation, 1/3/2019), the bartender working nightly at the famous club La Factoria, he described his experience of the hurricanes as well as their effects on local businesses throughout Old San Juan. In our conversation, he specifically pointed out the length of time it took La Factoria to reopen with normal business hours, and commented on the issues created by state mandated curfews on nightlife throughout the city:

IG: How long was the bar closed for?

JM: Somewhere around nine days. . . not as bad as it was in some other areas.

IG: How long did it take for it to get back up to a normal base of business after the hurricane? And when you opened back up, was there as much business as before?

JM: Eight or nine months to manage to get everything back together. It was not that it wasn't better than a lot of places. But it wasn't like before. It was very dark there were no lights after dark, you know you park your car and its scary because its pitch black by 6:00. So, we opened about nine days later, but everyone had to be home by 6:00, then a few weeks later by 9:00, then after a few months by 12:00 and we open at 4:00. It took forever for them to let us back open to normal hours. They did it on purpose because of the highway and stuff, but it was also really dangerous you know (1/3/2019).

From what I gathered in our conversation, these curfews drastically affected the ability of local businesses to operate on their regular schedules and to make even a moderate amount of income. La Factoria is a prominent bar in the area, so, as Murphy described, many of the hurricanes' effects seemed minimal for this venue in comparison to some other locations with less income and fewer resources. Several of the businesses around La Factoria were strongly affected, including one that permanently closed from the damages.

Many people during the hurricanes experienced loss of life and devastation, affecting the lives of millions, both on the island and in the diaspora. Those who survived lacked basic necessities for a standard quality of life. With much of the water being unsafe to drink, and many of the food resources failing, inhabitants of the Old San Juan area fell into unsustainable living conditions. During one of my discussions with Tito (personal conversation, 1/6/2019), he detailed his experience of the environment as it has changed over the course of climate-caused disaster. Many of his comments were critical of government powers, who have failed to find solutions to these issues; he emphasized that quick action remains necessary, before local ecologies suffer permanent change:

TR: They're doing bad things to the environment. And we are gonna lose that. This is one of the most beautiful places in the world, this is a paradise. So, if we are not here then we are gonna lose it, which would be so sad for us, and it would be so sad for the environment. Because there are animals that cannot [grow] up through a process, I mean they cannot say something about what's going on in our coasts. And that's a crime! That's an environmental crime!

IG: So, can I ask if you know about, or have opinions on climate change?

TR: Well it's all about money you know. We really need to change our lifestyle because the real problem for the whole world is climate change. And Maria! Hurricane Maria is a demonstration that we have to make some changes. . . You know the capitalists like Trump they don't really care, they only care about making money. . . This isn't just a Puerto Rico issue it's a world issue and in cases like ours it's a human rights one (1/6/2019).

During our conversation, he often lamented the devastating situation caused by the hurricanes, discussing the flooding effects of tidal surges, the breaking of buildings from gale force winds, and the power outages caused by extreme lighting outbursts. For him, this was an attack on the environment from climate change, and an inevitable eventuality of the capitalist system that the United States government took no efforts to fix. In this case, the island of Puerto Rico was left environmentally and economically unsustainable with extreme damages caused around the entire island. The destruction of this event stretched past the scope of the island itself in many cases.

Moreover, due to the destruction of the island's power grid, communication became impossible for many families around the world. Contacting loved ones did not appear as a tangible possibility for many of my contacts here in the United States. Both Valerie (personal conversation,

10/26/2018) and Carlos (personal conversation, 10/29/2018) described their experiences with the storms as difficult, having no contact with their families for up to 4 months as improvements were made to the island's power grid. Further, both now feel that a permanent return home for them will most likely never happen. In their cases, the dangers of returning, as well as negotiating life in an environment drastically different from the one they remember, provides little incentive. Their perspectives demonstrate that social ties are now broken in the climate-changed world we now face. These conditions demonstrate issues regarding the social sustainability of the island itself, bringing into question what facets of life are sustainable. The effects of this situation still occur throughout the island, and are more obvious in some places than others.

During my observational walks of the island's ecological conditions, I found some concerning situations resulting from the lasting effects of Maria. In La Perla, the sidewalk that runs along the main coastline suffered several breaking points from the force of tidal surges (see Figure 3.3). The houses fell victim to these effects as well, many bearing no roofs, and several missing walls with only tarp and wood as permanent replacements (see Figure 3.4). These areas hold very little hope of finding refurbishment from outside sources such as FEMA, especially now, so long after the hurricane relief efforts began. Many other places have undergone the extreme conditions of Maria's architectural and ecological destructions as well. During my observations of the all-natural beach Playa Pena, I found evidence of damage to the ecological integrity of the area. In the most

apparent of these changes a sidewalk had broken in half and fallen into a reef habitat of the beach, which houses a unique ecology. This section of sidewalk has not only left unsafe conditions for those traversing the beach and sidewalk but has also now forever changed the ecology of Playa Pena. While Maria caused a complete disaster that generated economic, social, and environmental unsustainable conditions, such as the degradation at Playa Pena, the people of Puerto Rico still united through cultural expression to form a strong sense of community.

### **Re-inscription, Memorialization, and Cultural Sustainability**

In the Old San Juan area, reclaiming and redefining space has been a surmountable part of recovering from hurricane Maria. One effort to do so took place in the construction of the hurricane Maria memorial (see Figure 3.5). This memorial stands not only as a testament to those affected by Maria, including those who lost their lives, but it also stands as a reminder for inhabitants and visitors that the community feels pride and strength in their home, even though it has now changed. The memorial consists of rows of low hanging umbrellas, in vibrant shades of blue, green, yellow, and pink, not unlike the vividly colored houses found throughout the area, and are all inscribed with “#PuertoRico.” This unique memorial does not take on the traditional form of stone statues or metal sculptures. Rather, this artistic choice to use umbrellas symbolizes a shield for Puerto Rico from hurricanes in the future. The shield not only represents the resilience of people living in Old San Juan, but also serves as a memory of loved



*Figure 3.3 Tidal Surge Damage*



*Figure 3.4 Tarp and Wood Frame Home*



*Figure 3.5 Hurricane Maria Memorial*

ones lost to such destructive forces. In this dedicatory street, we see the importance of reclaiming space while also constructing a form of memorialization for a past home and environment never to be experienced again.

The hurricane Maria memorial does not stand alone in terms of artistic inscription of these once colonial streets. Post Maria, many stores began to inscribe local walls, doors, and ceilings with “boricua,” bringing a louder political statement to this call for native identity. “Boricua,” as well as the Puerto Rican flag, is now present in the expression of many street artists’ work throughout the entire community, acting as a mode for reclaiming and memorializing home.

The creation of visual imagery is not the only aesthetic process by which this community has re-inscribed their home as boricua. The soundscape of this area forms a full and dense texture, with a variety of local sounds coming from the many businesses found through Calle Sol, Calle Luna, and Calle de San Francisco in Old San Juan. These pathways provide a place for many music clubs from reggaeton night dance scenes, to salsa clubs, to participatory bomba performance venues. This concoction of sound, predominantly reggaeton, sonically resonates in the claiming of space, demonstrating a re-inscription of community and a call to boricua identity for anyone traversing these paths. Reggaeton’s importance in this soundscape provides a unique sense of unity for many of the club’s attendees throughout Old San Juan. People can often be seen dancing, singing, and chanting together as they express their identity through reggaeton culture, thus reestablishing their conceptions of home. These

feelings are experienced by both people on the island and within the diaspora, as well as by both performers and participants.

As I conducted my fieldwork, I took a soundscape recording specifically along the sidewalks of Calle Tanca and Calle San Francisco. Several bars and clubs in this area have an open-air format. With windows down and doors open, the sound of each place resonates throughout the streets, creating a cacophony of music. Within this discord, I nonetheless recognized a certain beauty as I was able to identify each place's scene merely from the sounds coming from it. For instance, I discerned phrases from emblematic songs like "Desde el Corazon" and "Te Boté," suggesting which clubs were playing reggaeton. The extensive sounds of *dembow* perpetuated throughout these areas, marking reggaeton zones within these streets. It was in this recording process that I realized the importance of reggaeton in sonically representing place and how businesses, such as La Vergüenza, use these aural characteristics as a public identifier of boricua space.

During my conversations with both Tito (personal conversation, 1/6/2019) and Carlos (personal conversation, 10/29/2019), I gleaned insight into the importance of reggaeton both for locals on the island and for those living in the diaspora. Tito described to me how many musicians within the area used it as an expressive outlet to reestablish their sense of community.

IG: So, what do you think was most important after Maria?

TR: It was most definitely the music. It was the first thing that everyone latched onto. Everyone was playing and singing as much as possible in

the streets together. This was also very true of reggaeton. You see reggaeton has been so popular now that many quit performing it in the acoustic sense. But after Maria, you see all these rappers and local musicians come together and try to recreate that traditional acoustic reggaeton sound! It was such an amazing experience and is now so important for us in the area. I guarantee you can now find these acoustic concerts easy (1/6/2019).

Tito's description came to fruition in my own experience at the La Perla concert discussed in the previous chapter. The acoustic concert was completely unique to La Perla, as I had never heard this type of performance; such renderings of reggaeton now represent a newly established soundscape after the hurricanes. As described in chapter 2, the acoustic setting, in my experience, made the social environment more participatory through a new inflection of sound that was less computerized.

For Carlos (10/29/2018), the importance of reggaeton after Maria came not from a performance, but rather in listening to this music through media and while in diaspora. In our discussion of reggaeton's importance to his life, he stressed how much this music formed a culturally therapeutic experience when dealing with the tragedies of Maria.

CB: You see after the hurricane I could not talk to my family. I had friends here but I wanted home, and I need home. There seemed to be nothing left of it without having contact of my family unless I was listening to music. You see when I listened to reggaeton then it was no longer about sex, or drugs, or trying to show off how tough you can be. It was so much more, it was for me, bringing back home into my mind in a way that I had never needed before. It was there for me then and always will be (10/29/2018).

Carlos and Tito's experiences both show how important music, more specifically reggaeton, became in their processing of hurricane Maria's aftermath.

Boricua communities in Old San Juan use reggaeton and its surrounding culture to reestablish their home after the tragedies of climate-caused disaster. They have re-inscribed their spaces through both the sound of reggaeton and the imagery of local street graffiti to express their pride in boricua identity. Activities that memorialize the past, and pave new paths for the future, are now undertaken by locals as well as global reggaeton artists, who maintain important connections with the environmental effects on Puerto Rico's urban communities.

## CHAPTER IV

### GLOBAL MUSIC AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

#### **Glocalization, Ecotourism, and Local Flow**

In modern tourism, the global marketplace promotes unique environmental and ecological sites, creating business models based on the presumed and advertised grandeur of an area. However, this propaganda creates misleading interpretations of environment, complicating how environmental researchers understand such portrayals and their effects on local life. In particular, many environmental researchers draw distinctions between what some consider “green travel” experiences versus more questionable instances of “environmental exoticism,” as are found in the marketing of ecotourism (see Milton, 1996; Honey, 1999; Zapf, 2016). These approaches based in ecotourism set the foundation for the ways that places are marketed as travel destinations. As a part of this foundation, those within music industry participate in these marketing strategies. For Puerto Rico, “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee, influences ecotourism to the island because it’s an example of highly circulated global sound, having garnered the most YouTube views in history (Flores, 2018). The song employs the advanced cinematography, reconstruction of social milieus, and reimagining of place to exoticize the Puerto Rican environment through music video. This music video presents a portrayal of La Perla and the Old San

Juan area that does not reflect its actual setting and misinforms tourists who seek to traverse these spaces.

However, the global effects of reggaeton as viewed from an environmental perspective do not always prove so negative. Bad Bunny, a Puerto Rican trap and reggaeton artist, recently built himself a global image as an icon of this music. While his songs have not succeeded in the charts to the same extent as “Despacito” (Fonsi, 2017), his works still have a large effect over the global reggaeton soundscape. His songs, such as “Desde el Corazón” (Urbano Videos TV, 2018), bring a new way of viewing environment, identity, and environmentalism into the global spotlight of popular music. The soundscape of Old San Juan, and specifically La Perla, encompasses a mixing of global and local sounds; within these examples I find both features of exoticism as well as aspects of local environmental knowledge and experience. Global reggaeton musicians intertwine with La Perla’s culture, people, and sounds. My analysis of “Despacito” and “Desde el Corazón” shows these two different sides of environmental expression and their impact on local identity and soundscape. On the one hand, I demonstrate that “Despacito” exoticizes local culture and disrupts local cultural flows, by giving tourists false knowledge of Old San Juan and its environment. On the other hand, “Desde el Corazón,” provides an example of how global music is employed on a local scale and is incorporated into local cultural flows; in this way, the song expresses realities rather than mimics, including realities of the area’s environmental condition and local boricua identity.

Importantly, the global connections between reggaeton performance, ecology, environment, and local identity grow increasingly imperative to understand as the effects of climate-caused disaster still shape inhabitant life and knowledge. Tim Taylor (2003), building upon Arjun Appadurai's five scapes, details the relationship between the global and the local and its function within musical appropriation. Within this relationship, Taylor argues that glocalization encompasses "the extent to which the local and the global are no longer distinct—indeed, never were—but are inextricably intertwined, with one infiltrating and implicating the other" (p. 67). For reggaeton, this interconnectedness appears in two ways. In one case, some performers and producers appropriate and exploit local space and soundscapes in music production to promote economic gain from tourism. Second, some performers bring knowledge of boricua expressions of identity, environment, and ecology into the global sphere as a political statement on the decolonization of Puerto Rico. Here I employ glocalization to understand how ecotourism and musical expression work within global scapes, and thus impact the local.

When contextualizing the issues of glocalization, researchers must carefully and critically begin to understand how we think about ecotourism. The most common definition of ecotourism comes from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (TIES, 2015). TIES's website provides a guide to membership in the society as well as information regarding ecotourism's history, status, and usefulness in a time of environmental concern. This site also includes advice for

travelers on indigenous populations, climate change, and travel, and even includes sites with ecolodges (a type of green living space). TIES officially defines ecotourism as, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). In recent research from an anthropological perspective, this working interpretation finds support among scholars such as Martha Honey (1999), who explains the purpose of ecotourism and its impact on the environment. Honey discusses aspects of ecotourism in Cuba propagated by large corporations that use “green living” as a business tactic; she deems their work as ecotourism lite. In her discussion, Honey points out a problematic issue that many have overlooked in ecotourism studies, stating,

While big players in the industry try to package themselves as green, on-the-ground ecotourism frequently involves conflicting control of natural resources and tourism dollars, struggles over local versus international ownership, and public policy versus private enterprise debates. However, the most contentious and overlooked part of the ecotourism equation is typically involving, benefiting, and respecting the rights and culture of the local communities (p. 29).

Here, we see the separation between the goals of environmentalist thought and the goals of a globally commercial industry. Both ideologies—one of reality and one of artificial construction—prove pertinent not only within tourism, but also in understanding the role of particular musics as representative of a given culture and environment within global scapes.

Thus, the question becomes how glocalization outlines both local knowledge (Geertz, 1973) and how the outsider perceives local knowledge through ecotourism life. In both cases—ecotourism life and local acoustemology—aspects of global scapes form complex processes upon local environments. Compellingly, understanding how the environment works to shape indigenous life informs a comprehension of the separation between boricua environmental expression and ecotourism life. In this sense, humans create distinct categories within our social and environmental constructs, which delineate insider from outsider. According to John Powell and Stephen Menendian (2016), local knowledge reflects

our environments and social contexts, which include families, community leaders, and friends, [and which] tell us which distinctions matter and which associations, stereotypes, and meanings map to those categories. In that way, our environments prime us to observe particular differences and instruct us on which differences are relevant. These associations are not only descriptive; they impart social meanings that help us navigate our social worlds (p. 24).

From this standpoint, this knowledge also determines how people producing music within a global scale represent their environments based upon their particular intentions. This distinction between ecotourism life and local understanding of globalized music informs my study of the reggaeton community of Old San Juan.

Further, analyzing this difference gives insight into environmental and ecological glocalization and how it affects local soundscape, ecology, and social happenings. The music video for “Despacito” provides a fascinating example of

globalized ecotourism lite. The video perpetuates an exoticized view of Caribbean life, misconstruing social and physical structures found within La Perla and the club La Factoria. Oppositely, “Desde el Corazón” shows how some musicians use environmental expression to convey their own feelings of identity. Both examples demonstrate how the glocalization of reggaeton changes based on the choices made by each artist, and how each song holds a sonic meaning for locals, differentiated by how members of the community view the performer’s interpretation of boricua life.

### **“Despacito” and La Perla: Exoticizing Environments**

The music video for “Despacito” presents a unique situation for the viewer in terms of environment and space through its exaggerated cinematography and misrepresentation of social setting (Fonsi, 2017). The video begins with Luis Fonsi walking the rocky coast of Old San Juan and standing off of the main sidewalk along the beach. The image goes back and forth between Fonsi and an apparently local woman, who traverses this lower area of La Perla; the scene presents this neighborhood as beautiful coastline with bright and colorful life. As Daddy Yankee enters the song, a new scene appears within one of La Perla’s main streets. Here we see a group of locals, involved with the activities of daily life, such as men giving haircuts to children, older men playing dominos at a table, middle-aged men and women dancing with boomboxes that presumably play reggaeton, with children observing. These key images of reggaeton culture with dance, sound, and graffiti are present throughout the video. It also portrays

the area as both urban and natural, with images of trees and the beach, along with streets, cars, and urban homes.

This video misconstrues the actual environments and spaces as they exist within Puerto Rico both before and after hurricane Maria. Moreover, as the scenes unfold, the performance setting changes from the streets of La Perla into the dance rooms of La Factoria, the salsa bar that Murphy works at in Old San Juan. Here many of the shots continue with people wearing different styles of dress, from the hip-hop street wear featured previously, to salsa night club outfits; they enjoy a mixture of dance styles from *perreo* to salsa. The video takes place in three of La Factoria's rooms: the salsa club, the bar lounge, and the salsa dance and wine room. This segment portrays each room as a part of a local dance club that revolves around a middle class hip-hop and urban club life. At the end of this scene, the video continues past the recorded song with an interesting mix of bomba and the main participatory line. The song continues with a set of musicians playing drums not associated with reggaeton, all participants chanting the main participatory line of the song "*pasito a pasito, suave suavecito, nos vamos pegando, poquito a poquito*" [step by step, soft softly, we get closer, little by little] and continued dancing. However, within the video's specific setting of place and environment, the only lyrical reference to its geographical and cultural setting occurs towards the end when Fonsi specifically delineates both La Factoria and La Perla as Puerto Rican spaces.

The song builds upon an amalgamation of sound that references and represents reggaeton. Beginning with a solo guitar, it eventually builds into an electronic sound as Fonsi and Daddy Yankee enter with vocals. The sound of off-beat electric chords from a keyboard continues with little rhythmic percussion. Beginning at the first chorus, an underlying *dembow* percussion enters and persists throughout the rest of the song. At this moment the music takes on a full reggaeton sound with aspects of reggae and hip-hop upheld by the foundational *dembow* rhythm. Fonsi sings smooth melodic lines while Daddy Yankee raps, thus giving a more typical sound of reggaeton. The song consists of a dynamic and consistent pulse with the performers employing musical elements that invite participation from listeners.

The first case of misrepresentation in the video appears in its portrayal of life within La Perla. While my trip occurred after the impact of Maria, many of the social settings, economic conditions, and infrastructural hazards that I saw had already existed before the hurricane (Urban, 2015), and during the filming of “Despacito.” The exoticization of the coast through heightened colors and edited shots in the cinematography proves vital in understanding how this performance conveys local life, and how starkly it contrasts with real experience. As I traversed this coastline, I experienced horrible smells, trash and plastics covering the rocks and sand, completely broken sidewalks, and severely damaged homes. Those involved in making the music video for “Despacito,” however, made clear decisions to turn La Perla’s streets into an imagined space of Caribbean culture

and happiness. This depiction leads many misinformed tourists to traverse the area, often putting themselves at risk, and perpetuating an already existing danger of potential gentrification (Urban, 2014). The residents don't take either of these scenarios well. La Perla is a community of closely intertwined relationships with clearly defined outsiders and insiders. In the case of visitors paying little attention to local flow, disruption can occur. Tourists coming into La Perla put themselves in precarious situations with locals due to misinformation.

Since "Despacito" (Fonsi, 2017), some visitors have begun making videos of their dangerous travels into the barrio. While La Perla does hold a high reputation for crime, many threats can be avoided by following the local set of social rules. One such issue is visual recording; in my own experience, filming or taking photos often upset citizens, followed by disapproving looks and even threats. Tourists' lack of knowledge and understanding stems in part from how "Despacito" portrays life; the assumptions they make as a result often leave them in hazardous situations that also disrupt local flow. While La Perla does contain some elements found within the video, any visitor can see the same features I noted—a clear level of poverty, a strong sense of nightlife, and an overall sense of environmental degradation. The performers of the music video intentionally exoticize the area's environment, culture, and music in order to appeal to a global audience, misrepresenting the true social flows of La Perla.

Further, the video displays elements of reggaeton dance, style, and place within the rooms of La Factoria. However, this portrayal is extremely problematic

and fails to recognize the actual role of La Factoria within the local soundscape and social system. As I saw in my fieldwork, this bar primarily functions as a salsa club with a wine room and a liquor room. Each zone within the building displays its own art, even while all share the unique lighting system seen within the video. La Factoria clearly serves upscale, middle to high class clientele; the bar only allows patrons ages 23 and up to enter. Only salsa music—not reggaeton—plays in the three main rooms, which primarily serve as dance areas in the club. Bartenders in the front bar, the liquor room, play a mix of music from the Latin American and United States charts through speakers on a low setting, allowing attendees to use the area as a chatting lounge. Significantly, the bartenders strictly hold only one position on music: it is a reggaeton free environment. This is not to say that the bartenders dislike reggaeton, but that the club is branded firmly as a salsa bar. The sounds of reggaeton do not play in La Factoria and the club clearly distinguishes itself from reggaeton-related styles and associated social classes. The bartender Murphy informed me of how he felt about reggaeton and the “Despacito” (Fonsi, 2017) music video, pronouncing his annoyance with the song’s effects on the bar.

When I first brought up “Despacito,” I could tell that Murphy already felt a sense of irritation toward the song and its impact on the local soundscape (Personal Conversation, 1/3/2019). He informed me that the song originally did not upset him, and that even though he didn’t primarily listen to reggaeton, the genre still held some value in his life. However, “Despacito” soon created a new,

disruptive element in his work at La Factoria, and Murphy attributed this to misrepresentations found within the video.

IG: I know you have a salsa bar here, and mostly cater to that audience. So how often do people come in wanting to hear reggaeton?

JM: Oh my God. Every day. \*chuckling\* Every day.

IG: Every day?

JM: Yeah, every day.

IG: Was that happening before or after the “Despacito” video?

JM: I mean before? It happened occasionally with some locals. But after? Yeah, they wanted that song played all the time every day . . . Now It happens so much more now that people know that it was in the video, and they wanna see the place where it was filmed and come in like “oh we wanna hear it!”

IG: Did you ever give in and start having a reggaeton night here?

JM: No, it just really doesn’t fit into the vibe here.

IG: Do you know of a reason why they chose to film here?

JM: No. There wasn’t really a reason, they just liked the space and its very private. But it definitely changed things here (1/3/2019).

In our conversation, Murphy clearly stated his discontent with the song’s impact on the club, although he continued to talk about its benefit to local tourism. While Murphy appreciated the commerce it brought to the area, he complained of how the video gave invalid portrayals of both La Factoria and La Perla, providing tourists with corrupt knowledge. As stated before, this led many of them into dangerous situations, causing upsets to the social mores of the area based on their preconceived understandings.

During my time in Old San Juan, I heard the song “Despacito” sounding through the streets on only one occasion. As I walked one morning to a local coffee and slam poetry shop, I heard sounds of a violin coming from a street performer nearby. I immediately grabbed my breakfast and went to sit and listen for a while. As I observed, many people paid him, asking to hear specific songs mostly from the United States pop charts. I spent several hours watching these interactions; during that span I recorded a total of 14 times that the violinist played “Despacito,” all of which were for payment by tourists visiting the area, most likely from the United States. In this moment, I realized how the globalization of this song, due to its extreme popularity, impacted the local soundscape in a very different way than other examples of reggaeton. The song now irritates many locals, but it also continues to draw visitors to the island, who wish to hear the song and see the places and cultures represented in the music video.

Overall, “Despacito” increased tourism to the island and Old San Juan, benefitting the local socioeconomic conditions (Flores, 2018). However, this came with negative reactions from the public as the song and its video did not appropriately portray the environment, social setting, ecology, or boricua identity that many feel and express in music as a part of daily life. In essence, “Despacito” (Fonsi, 2017) provides an example of glocalization, and the potential negative effects that such songs have on local spaces. This negative relationship between the global and the local comes from marketing strategies of ecotourism.

Fonsi and Daddy Yankee self-colonize this area to popularize their music in the fashion of ecotourism lite. While the video is set in a real Puerto Rican location, the performers use cinematography to exoticize the areas' real physical state. Ecotourism lite can bring economic gain to locals, but it acts in opposition to inhabitants' expression of self and space.

### **Bad Bunny and the Frog**

While glocalization presents unique problems with musical interaction between the local and the global, in some cases global representation becomes vital for local communities, their soundscapes, and expressions of identity. Bad Bunny, the increasingly famous Latin trap and reggaeton artist, holds a high respect within the local reggaeton community as a model of boricua culture, identity, and sounds. Much of his music comes from an activist standpoint, illuminating his happiness and appreciation of boricua culture, but also expressing his discontent with current politics and how they shape boricua life. In one of his most recent works, "Desde el Corazón" (Urbano Videos TV, 2018), Bad Bunny expresses his identity through reggaeton, local space, and ecology. He makes bold political statements regarding his pride in Puerto Rico through lyrics that reveal his sense of boricuaness in performance; the song also provides an example of communities employing global music into a local soundscape. An understanding of the complexities of sound, ecology, environment, and identity within "Desde el Corazón" comes from a close reading of its lyrics.

Yeh yeh yeh yeh  
 Yeh, yeh, yeh, yeh, eh!  
 Benito Martínez  
 De Puerto Rico  
 Empezamo' de abajo  
 Ahora somos rico'  
 Pero nunca olvido de donde salí  
 Y donde fue que mi primer tema escribí, ey  
 787-858  
 Y el resto te lo doy después.  
 Desde San Juan hasta Mayagüez  
 La Nueva Religión, dime si crees, eh eh  
 Ayer era bagger  
 Hoy soy millonario  
 El bebé de mami  
 El orgullo del barrio  
 Significo poder  
 Búscalos en el diccionario  
 Que este es Stephen Curry  
 Me quieren los Warrior'  
 Pero na'  
 Yo sigo en los Cangrejeros  
 Con los Capitanes y los Vaqueros  
 Aunque mañana le dé la vuelta al mundo entero  
 Aunque en el Banco Popular no quepa mi dinero  
 Y yo me quedo en Puerto Rico aunque venga María  
 En el calentón, esto nunca se enfría  
 Aquí to's meten mano, to's tenemos cría  
 La Isla del Encanto, la tierra bendecia'  
 Y gracias ma', por haberme parido aquí  
 Cerquita de la playa y el coquí  
 To's sayayines, tenemos el Ki  
 El sol siempre nos alumbra  
 Si quiero, esta navidad le doy parranda corriendo jetski  
 Ey  
 Escuchando salsa y reggaeton  
 Daddy Yankee, Tego Calderón  
 Don Omar, Wisin, Yandel  
 Ivy, Vico, Eddie, René  
 Lavoe, Frankie, Ismael y Curet  
 Ey  
 Todos sirvieron como inspiración  
 Dios bendiga mi generación  
 El Conejo desde el corazón, ey

*Bad bunny baby*  
*Bad bunny baby, ba ba ba*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
 Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, eh!  
 Benito Martínez  
 From Puerto Rico  
 We started from the bottom  
 Now we are rich  
 But I'll never forget where I came from  
 And where it was that I wrote my first song, ey  
 787-858  
 And the rest I'll tell you later.  
 From San Juan to Mayagüez  
 The New Religion, tell me if you believe, eh eh  
 Yesterday was a bagger  
 I'm a millionaire today  
 Mommy's baby  
 Pride of the ghetto  
 I meant power  
 Search for it in the dictionary  
 That this is Stephen Curry  
 The Warriors want me  
 But na  
 I'm still with the Cangrejeros  
 With the Captains and the Cowboys  
 Although tomorrow I'm traveling around the entire world  
 Even the Banco Popular can't hold my money  
 And I will stay in Puerto Rico, even if Maria returns.  
 In the heat, this never gets cold.  
 To get a hand here, we have sex  
 Island of Charm, the blessed land.  
 And thanks ma ', for giving birth to me here  
 Close to the beach and the coquí  
 In the Engines, we have Kilos  
 The sun always shines on us  
 If I want, this Christmas I will party on a running jet ski  
 Hey  
 Listening to salsa and reggaeton  
 Daddy Yankee, Tego Calderón  
 Don Omar, Wisin, Yandel  
 Ivy, Vico, Eddie, René  
 Lavoe, Frankie, Ismael and Curet

Hey  
 All of them are inspirations  
 God bless my generation  
 The Rabbit from the heart, hey  
 Bad bunny baby  
 Bad bunny baby, ba ba (Martinez-Ocasio, 2018)

These lyrics reveal several Bad Bunny's various positions on reggaeton, ecology, environment, and issues of climate change. Towards the middle of the song, Bad Bunny sings the lyrics "and I will stay in Puerto Rico, even if Maria returns." Here, Bad Bunny makes a call out to issues surrounding hurricane Maria. This passage, while not directly assailing them, attacks the Trump administration and FEMA for supplying little to no help in terms of disasters caused by the hurricane. His lyrics refer to Maria as an entity of climate change, and as a formidable force that brought chaos to the island and its people. Bad Bunny's political statement to never leave even if Maria (or, by implication, any other hurricane) were to return, represents his unshakable love and pride for the island, its ecology, its inhabitants, and its culture.

Bad Bunny makes specific reference to cities within Puerto Rico, most importantly San Juan, and also praises two important ecological expressions of boricua identity. In the passage, "And thanks ma ', for giving birth to me here, close to the beach and the coquí," Bad Bunny invokes the importance of the island's many beaches, as well as its mascot. This symbol, the coquí frog, forms an important part of identity for many inhabitants of the island, and more specifically for those who identify as boricuas. The little brown frog is a native species to the island and takes its name from an onomatopoeic descriptor of the

sound it makes, “ko-ki.” This frog is a representative of boricua identity for locals and is expressed in much of their music.

During a conversation with Tito, we discussed the importance of the coquí to local identity and the music of reggaeton (Personal conversation, 1/6/2019). Tito not only expressed the significance of the coquí frog for boricuas and the local soundscape, but also indicated how its sound influenced the musical production of reggaeton.

IG: What is the importance of the coquí?

TR: Yeah that is similar to what I said earlier with us. That it's the roots of our identity. And the coquí has been here from the beginning! More than 500 years living here! We hear and we love the coquí sound. It's an impression of Puerto Rico. If you take that frog out of Puerto Rico it will die. The people living here, our indigenous people the Taino, they drew the coquí onto rocks. So, you look at that and you know the Taino started this connection that has lasted over 500 years. So, for me that is as powerful as the word boricua. They are one and the same and they are in our blood.

IG: How does the coquí help you in a musical sense?

TR: It is our music! Our music is the most important part of our identity, it is how I express myself. The coquí, boricua, Taino it is all a part of this performance. You can even hear the coquí in reggaeton (1/6/2019).

Tito continued to play on a table with his hands the reggaeton rhythm, showing me how the call of the coquí fits in. To explain, I return to Manuel and Largey's (2016) description of the beat as an “insistent, kinetic *boom- chaboom-chick-boom-chaboom-chick*” (p. 113). But in incorporating Tito's explanation, from an ecomusicological approach of understanding the *dembow* rhythm, we can render it instead as follows: *boom- cha coquí boom- cha coquí*. In this way, the frog not

only shapes an ecological expression of boricua identity, but also inspires the *dembow* sound. This important ecological part of boricua identity, and the effects of hurricane Maria, outline the acceptance of, and deep meanings behind, “Desde el Corazón” in the local soundscape.

The song provides an interesting example of reggaeton that does not follow all of the genre’s musical rules. Similar to “Despacito” (Fonsi, 2017), it begins with solo guitar; Bad Bunny enters shortly thereafter. As Bad Bunny raps in his unique melodic style, guitars continue with a reggae-like syncopated pulse, all supported by a light electronic percussion. However, this percussive part lacks any aspect of *dembow*, and instead sounds similar to a general hip-hop beat in 4/4 time. Bad Bunny saves the *dembow* rhythm to create an intense musical effect later in the song. Significantly, the rhythm faintly resounds at the mention of the coquí in the lyrics; it then comes into full resonance in conjunction with Bad Bunny’s call out to reggaeton, when he lists the various artists who have inspired him. Bad Bunny’s rhythmic choices reveal the significance of reggaeton by lyrically linking it not only with environment, but also the sonic meanings of *dembow*.

I heard Bad Bunny’s song several times in my sound walks, as it was played in local shops, cars, and most nightlife venues. However, for me, the most interesting experience of its incorporation into the local soundscape occurred in a live setting near La Perla at one of Tito’s performances at La Vergüenza, the local bar and night club. This three-story club is divided into separate areas, with

the top floor serving as a tiki styled dance area. Tito performs a reggaeton night there every Friday, which draws many locals out to the venue. I attended one of these concerts, and during my observation Tito asked the crowd if there was a song they would like to hear. Several audience members began to shout for him to play “Desde el Corazón” (Urbanos Videos TV, 2018). Tito DJed the song with most of the crowd singing along the entire time. Many of the attendees made specific dance motions, aside from *perreo*, during the performance: placing a hand over their heart at the end of the song, tapping their chest or making shaka signs (a hand gesture used often in reggaeton with a clenched fist, and thumb and pinky extended) for the *coquí*, and pointing to the sky during the reference of hurricane Maria. These dance gestures, as well as the enthusiastic request for the song, shows the community’s recognition of “Desde el Corazón” as an expression of ecology and identity for those in the local San Juan scene. This representation also demonstrates how glocalized music can form a positive relationship between the global and local for environmental expression, rather than the negative effects of ecotourism lite, as seen in the previous example.

Bad Bunny’s “Desde el Corazón” (Urbanos Videos TV, 2018) and Luis Fonsi (2017) and Daddy Yankee’s “Despacito” show two different glocalized musical examples within the reggaeton soundscape, and their relationships with Puerto Rican culture and environment. Fonsi (2017) and Yankee’s work did bring tourism to the island but through a misleading view of actual locations, causing disturbance to the social and cultural flows of urban scenes like La Perla. In this

case, the song, its sound, and its marketing prove appealing within global scapes, in which it functions as a type of ecotourism lite; however, the song in turn disrupts these scapes on a local scale. On the other hand, the glocalization of reggaeton does not always present such negative situations. “Desde el Corazón” (Urbanos Videos TV, 2018) demonstrates the importance of some global artists for the expression of space and identity on the local scale. In this sense, the song does not disrupt the flow of global and local scapes, but rather informs both with local experiential knowledge. “Desde el Corazón” shows the importance of ecology to local identity in reggaeton for those living in La Perla and Old San Juan, post hurricane Maria. Bad Bunny’s performance also demonstrates ways in which global music production may better influence ecotourism as a non-disruptive process of international and national flow.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **REGGAETON AND RAGE: CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This thesis shows the intricate ways that environment, ecology, reggaeton, and boricua identity interrelate during a time of climate-caused crisis. My ethnographic wayfaring, consideration of global flows, and use of critical theory in sustainability demonstrates these connections as they relate to hurricanes Irma and Maria. Even now the people of Puerto Rico and their government struggle to bring balance to the island's political climate. This difficulty in part exists due to policies held over from bills like PROMESA, damages done to the infrastructure, unstable social conditions, and the continuation of poor economic positions on the island due to the environmental degradation of hurricane Maria (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). While no sense of traditional sustainability is present on the island, boricuas continue to sustain their homes and cultures through sonic and visual elements of reggaeton.

I have addressed issues of space, environment, and expression for those participating in reggaeton culture post-hurricane Maria. People living on the island and within the diaspora use this music not only as a sense of Puerto Rican pride, but also as an expression of their boricua identity against United States colonial policies. In my examples, such as the Yandel concert, I show the importance of reggaeton in defining a boricua space, especially within the context of colonial or diasporic place. Boricuas employ reggaeton in an ever-growing

movement to bring Puerto Rican politics into the flow of global scapes (Appadurai, 1996). These issues also demonstrate how the act of feeling aesthetic meaning (Fox, 2004) occurs as a unique experience for those participating within a given culture. My research has employed Thomas Turino's (2003) concept of musical participation, whereby I revealed that musical engagement in reggaeton takes place through a variety of sonic experiences, including radio, streaming, concerts, and clubs. Further, these pathways provide equally valid and meaningful identifications with reggaeton music and related cultures. Those within the southeastern United States diaspora, like Carlos and Valerie, experience the same kinds of feeling as those in the local soundscape, as reggaeton penetrates global sonic flows, even while it persists on the island.

The destruction of hurricane Maria brought a sense of disrupted flow to many communities living on the island, especially in La Perla. Shortly thereafter, the rising issues of sustainability for people coping with the disasters of climate-caused devastation caused environmental researchers to take a closer look at the process at work in Puerto Rico. Much work on sustainability does not consider aesthetics as integral to understanding how a group of people may sustain their lives. However, Aaron Allen and Kevin Dawes (2016) define sustainability as,

The capacity to endure; the conditions under which humans and the environment can exist in productive harmony, and which allow the natural, social, economic, and cultural flourishing of present and future generations. . . sustainability is sometimes associated with the 'triple bottom line' (people, planet, profit) or the "three Es" (equity, environment, economy, to which culture or aesthetics may be added) (p. 292).

I view music in terms of sonic aesthetics and as an important structure of sustainability for those experiencing the challenges of climate change. For Puerto Rico, no sense of sustainability in the traditional pillars existed for the island and its people after the impact of hurricane Maria (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2018). However, many boricuas sustained their livelihood and culture through the production of music, including reggaeton. Boricuas within these communities, such as La Perla, employed reggaeton as a means of not only expressing local environment, ecology, and identity, but also as a sustainer of culture during a time of distress. My time in Puerto Rico, as well as my work with boricuas in the diaspora, shows the importance of reggaeton to environmental expression of identity, claiming of space, and sustaining of culture and community after hurricane Maria. As an environmental researcher, I sought to understand the complexities of environment and music for the reggaeton community in Old San Juan. During this project my hopes were always that others might learn from this work, and that those harboring misconceptions about environmental issues might find new knowledge in ecocritical thought.

Shortly after my departure from the island, the famed talk show host Jimmy Fallon and his “Tonight” show band The Roots took a trip to Puerto Rico for a week to record an episode. NBC journalists Gabe Gutierrez and Jason Calabretta (2019) gave a report on the event and its happenings after conducting an interview with Fallon. Once in Old San Juan, Fallon filmed several videos in support of local Puerto Rican communities, including one where he listed

available donation sites for continuing hurricane relief. Fallon also appeared in conjunction with Lin Manuel Miranda who was opening a production of his musical *Hamilton* in Santurce, San Juan.

Bad Bunny, Jimmy Fallon, and The Roots (2019) all came together to make a music video for the San Sebastián street festival that takes place in Old San Juan. Fallon begins the video exclaiming “Old San Juan! I feel at home here man” (0:00-0:02). He then puts on a pair of the iconic Bad Bunny glasses, and soon after meets the man himself. Bad Bunny begins his performance of the reggaeton hit “MIA” without the typically featured artist Drake. The group marches down the streets of Old San Juan, slowly growing as more people join the parade-like performance. The crowd exhibits many aspects of Puerto Rican music and culture, with several boricuas waving the Puerto Rican flag and singing along. Bad Bunny leads this sonically striking performance of reggaeton, expressing boricua culture, pride, and place. Further, the most important aspect occurs during the end of the march, which finishes underneath the hurricane Maria memorial. This moment is a testament to the importance of reggaeton in the boricua soundscape and how this music shapes and expresses the environmental experience of locals within Old San Juan from a global perspective.

This video and moment encapsulate the entire experience I have detailed in my work above. Reggaeton as a sound forms an important part of musical expression for those in the Old San Juan community and those in the diaspora. It

expresses a pride in boricua identity against oppression, a memorialization of those lost to environmental degradation. Most significantly, the pride and hope of a strong community still striving to bring sustainable conditions back to the island and cities they love. From an outsider's perspective, I believe that these are the examples we must learn from so people may be informed by local knowledge when sending aid to these areas, as well as when traveling. In an interview with Gabe Gutierrez and Jason Calabretta (2019) Jimmy Fallon stated, "I think this shows Puerto Rico that we love them, and we didn't forget, and we love them, and we want to support them and the rebuilding. I mean it's already back. It's open for business" (p. 1).

Moreover, the use of reggaeton to express a boricua identity also encompasses issues of race, ethnicity, and space. In these chapters, I have not addressed the complexities of gender and sexuality within the discourse of reggaeton or hip-hop studies as a whole, and this offers a possible avenue for further research. Shortly after my departure, a troubling event occurred within the reggaeton community, resulting in the loss of a performer's life. Kevin Fret, the first openly gay reggaeton performer, was found shot to death in a street of Santurce, San Juan on January 10, 2019. His music often challenged gender and sexual norms set forth by many other performers within the reggaeton community, most popularly in his song "Diferente" [Different]. Since Fret was a prominent member and advocate of the LGBTQ community, his murder brings much concern to ideas surrounding machismo, and how these function within

reggaeton social settings. This recognition may be best described by the Trans Youth Coalition (2019), whose Facebook post on Fret's murder stated, "Kevin broke many barriers and served as a necessary representation, denouncing without filter the homophobia of colleagues in artistic scenes notorious for their machismo and misogyny." While some speculation exists regarding the motive for the murderer, many believe that it was the result of a hate crime generated by the increased rate of violence this year in Puerto Rico. Researchers within the hip-hop community must continue to address issues of gender and sexuality as an important factor of identity. In these cases, tensions felt among groups of people can heighten after disastrous situations.

I believe scholars have much room to move forward in our discussion of the reggaeton community. The violence present within these areas, especially in the above example toward members of the LGBTQ community, invites us to further rethink our approach to such study, including within the contexts of an ecomusicological approach. With intense, climate-caused disasters on the rise around the globe, others researching reggaeton, environmental degradation, and identity should also consider the realities of how gender and sexuality shape the experience of those living both on the island and within the diaspora.

My journey began at the isolated beaches of Hilton Head Island and led me all the way to the beautiful, vibrant, and often troubled streets of La Perla. While wayfaring, my life has interacted with wonderful people who helped me gain insight into the use of reggaeton for boricuas as cultural sustainability. I

have shown how the impact of climate change warps our understandings of place during environmental disasters. For my dear friends, hurricane Maria was a terrible and unforgettable event that impacted their lives forever. Here, I have revealed the ways that boricuas use reggaeton in recovering from these events, especially by using reggaeton to re-inscribe home and memorialize the past. We must continue to understand—carefully and thoughtfully—how music works on a global scale and how it exerts its roles within local flows. The pathways I have detailed above show the importance of globalized reggaeton for boricuas in connection to their environments.

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## VITA

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