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Testimonios in Liminal Spaces: Puerto Rican Women Living in Extended-Stay and Shelter Hotels in New York City After Hurricane Maria

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TESTIMONIOS IN LIMINAL SPACES: PUERTO RICAN
WOMEN LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY EXTENDED-STAY
AND SHELTER HOTELS AFTER HURRICANE MARIA

by

JESSICA FRANCES CRESPO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Extended-Stay and Shelter Hotel After Hurricane Maria

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Jessica Frances Crespo

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Testimonios In Liminal Spaces: Puerto Rican Women Living In Extended- Stay and Shelter Hotels After Hurricane Maria

by

Jessica Frances Crespo

Advisor: Karen Miller

As a result of Hurricane Maria, many Puerto Rican women were forced to seek refuge in New York City's extended-stay and shelter hotels. This research reviews the concept of permanent liminality and applies it to the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. The study focuses on the testimonios of six Puerto Rican women, who voiced their experiences and struggles while living in between home/ homelessness and New York City/Puerto Rico. In their testimonios women employed the discourse of motherhood to legitimize their children's needs as U.S. citizens. The testimonios locate women within a larger community of Puerto Ricans who resisted FEMA's second-class treatment. Each testimonio presents themes connected to women's struggles, anxieties about living in a liminal space, rights, and equal treatment as citizens.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Maria left Puerto Rico in total darkness. However, it illuminated the history of U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial relationship. After the hurricane, at nighttime, Puerto Rico was invisible in satellite images. The darkness that covered the whole island promoted the perception of Puerto Rico as a colonial property of the U.S. and its economic and political implications. The hurricane shed light on the island's current crisis, the legacies of colonialism and the consequences of neoliberal policies. Puerto Rico's inability to recover from Hurricane Maria and the Federal government's slow response to the disaster sped up Puerto Rican migration to the United States. The U.S. neglect towards U.S. citizens and the second-class treatment towards Puerto Ricans must be traced to 1898, the year in which Puerto Rico stop being a colony of Spain and became a United States colony. Since the U.S. invasion, Puerto Ricans has been regarded by the U.S. Supreme Court as "foreign in a domestic sense," which translates to subjects to different rights and guarantees. Between 1901 and 1922 a series of decisions known as the Insular Cases validated the U.S. colonial agenda in Puerto Rico. These cases established that Puerto Ricans were (are) subjects of U.S. laws but that they did (do) not enjoy full political equality. Also, these series of Supreme Court decisions are the base of Puerto Ricans second-class treatment. The devastation of Hurricane Maria revives the interest in understanding how these set of laws, from the Jones Act to PROMESA justify and legalized the discriminatory treatment of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans lives in between being colonial citizens and U.S. citizens, in a country submerged in a prolonged crisis that has forced many of its citizens to live in between the island and the United States. For Puerto Ricans, citizenship is ambiguous and does not guarantee fundamental human rights, forcing its citizens to live in a permanent liminal state.

In 2006, the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States increased due to the island's economic recession and austerity measures. In 2008, the Puerto Rican population in the United States reached 4.2 million, in comparison to 3.8 which is the population on the island. The Puerto Rican migration has increased steadily every year. After Hurricane Maria, the movement of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. escalated tremendously. According to Teralytics, a New York-based company, after Hurricane Maria, nearly 400,000 Puerto Ricans left the island between October 2017 and February 2018.¹ Approximately six percent of the Puerto Rican population on the island. The geo-referenced data allowed us to witness the magnitude of the Puerto Rican migration, in comparison to other Puerto Rican migration estimates, such as the research conducted by the Center for Puerto Ricans Studies, which focused on the number of students who enroll in schools around the United States.² However, the migration estimates only counted the people who carried a smartphone, not including other family members such as children and the elderly, and none of the research included data on gender.

More Puerto Rican women are migrating than men. Many of the women who migrate are heads of their families and struggles with high levels of poverty. According to the Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico, in the 2016, female migration was about fifty-three percent; currently, it surpasses male migration.³ Puerto Rican women migrate today for the same reasons that sparked the massive Puerto Rican migration of the 1950s: high unemployment, Puerto Rico and U.S. political and economic relations, and the facility to travel from one country to another one.

This study focuses on women who migrated to New York City after Hurricane Maria,

¹ Echenique, Martin and Luis Melgar. "Mapping Puerto Rico's Hurricane Migration with Mobile Phone Data," <https://www.citylab.com/environment/2018/05/watch-puerto-ricos-hurricane-migration-via-mobile-phone-data/559889/> (accessed January 20, 2019).

² Hinojosa, Jennifer and Nashia Román. "Puerto Rican Post-Maria Relocation by State," <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/PDF/Schoolenroll-v2-3-3-2018.pdf>" (accessed January 12, 2019).

³ Perfil del Migrante, 2016. Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico. https://estadisticas.pr/files/Publicaciones/PM_2016_1.pdf (accessed January 15, 2019).

specifically the experience of those living in extended-stay and shelter hotels, and who are not planning on returning to the island. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) granted the Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) program to qualified victims of Hurricane Maria. For almost a year, thousands of Puerto Rican families lived in extended-stay hotels all over the United States. This study focuses on women who lived with their families in extended-stay hotels. Due to FEMA's restrictions, some moved into shelter hotels. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the displaced Puerto Rican women who struggle to find permanent housing and employment in New York City.

Through displaced Puerto Rican women's testimonios, the study analyzes how women used the discourse of motherhood to claim legitimacy and resist FEMA's treatment of them as second-class citizens. The narratives from women's testimonios reveal how Puerto Rican mothers constructed home in the liminal space of the extended-stay and shelter hotel. From "home" women adopted their traditional roles, which had historically been imposed on them by the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Displaced Puerto Rican mothers asserted that their children as U.S. citizens are worthy of a good education, health care, and stable housing. As colonial subjects, poor mothers believed that they needed to prove that they were not going to waste the government's aid and therefore positioned themselves against the "welfare mother" stereotype. Women insisted on their need to find employment as soon as possible in order to gain independence from the government.

I use the concept of permanent liminality to describe Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. More specifically, I am interested in how historically, the American and Puerto Rican politicians have destined Puerto Ricans to live in a permanent liminal state. Following Bjørn Thomassen's discussion of liminality, which identifies various spatial and temporal aspects of liminality, I show that Thomassen's concepts can be applied to individuals, larger groups, and

whole societies. The concept of permanent liminality is useful to understand Puerto Ricans second class citizens, and multiple historical moments in which the island struggles with crises. For example, it can help explain Puerto Rico's current economic crisis, the devastation of hurricane Maria and the imposition of a Fiscal Board, which controls the islands' sovereignty. This study contributes to the literature on liminality by exploring women's experiences in the aftermath of an environmental disaster and gaining insight into women and their family's lives in extended-stay and shelter hotels.

Liminality

In order to have a background on Puerto Rican migration, I read Jorge Duany's *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* which analyzed the lasting colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Focusing specifically on Puerto Rican's identity and the need to include the diaspora in the U.S. as part of the debate, Duany's uses the metaphor of the "vaivén" to explain the circular and constant migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States. Duany questions the meaning of the Puerto Rican identity, and describes the island as stateless because after centuries under U.S colonial ruled it remains a Spanish speaking, Afro- Hispanic Caribbean nation.⁴ Although Duany doesn't use the term liminality, the book emphasized how the U.S. has destined Puerto Rico to be a "postcolonial-colony" to live in "betwixt." In the same manner as liminality, "vaivén" suggests "unsteadiness, inconstancy, and oscillation."⁵ Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory " belongs to but is not part of" of the U.S. In 2017, Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the U.S. gained renewed interest after hurricane Maria left the island in chaos and total collapse.

After hurricane Maria, newspaper headlines pointed to Puerto Rico's prolonged colonial relationship with the U.S. Most headlines focus on what the media described as a "massive exodus" due to the sudden natural disaster. Newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Huffington Post* covered the story of Puerto Rican refugee families living in extended-stay and shelter hotels in New York City, Florida, and Connecticut. The articles in the newspapers and the desire to connect with my fellow Puerto Ricans motivated me to expand on the research on Puerto

⁴ Duany, Jorge. *The Puerto Rican nation on the move: Identities on the island and in the United States*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

⁵ Duany, Jorge. *The Puerto Rican nation on the move: Identities on the island and in the United States*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

Rican migration, particularly to apply the concept of liminality. During my research, I observed that most women migrated to New York City because as the term "vaivén" and "liminality" suggests, they are going through a period of uncertainty. After listening to displaced Puerto Rican women's testimonios it was understandable that Puerto Rican women living in extended-stay and shelter hotels experienced numerous dimensions of liminality. Let's first take a look into the origins of the concept liminality.

The term liminality means in-between or transitional. Some scholars have outlined this term's origin to the Latin word "limen," according to Webster Dictionary which means a threshold (Szokolczai,2009; Turner,1967; Weber, 2005). However, others have outlined the word root to "limes," defined as boundary or border (Neuman, 2012; Thomassen, 2012). Some other scholars have pointed to both "limes" and "limen" (Kamsteeg, Spiegel, Waal, Wels, 2011). The term liminality described a state in which individuals or societies are living in between positions, a state of ambiguity.

The term "liminality" was originally developed by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957). Van Gennep published Rites of Passage in 1909, but it was not until 1960 that his book was translated into English. The Rites of Passage explores the concept of liminality in small-scale society rites. When it came out, van Gennep's anthropological work was marginalized by the French academia, and he became better known for his work on folklore and ethnology. As an anthropologist, one of Van Gennep's most significant contributions was to explain that rites of passage such as ceremonial events (marriages, birth, maturity, and death) "exist in every culture." All societies use rituals to mark the transition of an individual or a community from one social or religious status to another.

Liminality refers to the in-between phase of "being and yet not being" that these rites of passage mark. Van Gennep divided the ceremonies into three phases: the first, a preliminary stage,

during this one the participants of the rites are separated from their previous life; second, a liminal phase, individuals or communities are going through a period of transition between one place or status to another one; third, post-liminal stage, is the ceremony of incorporation to society, and the beginning of the new life.⁶ Nowadays, van Gennep's concept of liminality is part of many disciplines, also it outlasted the transition from modernism to postmodernism, and the concept continues to receive attention from scholars in different academic fields.

The term liminality was introduced in 1909, but it was not until 1960 that van Gennep's concept achieved recognition through Victor Turner's work. Turner expanded the concept of liminality and released it from the academic margins, assuring its widely use by sociologists, ethnographers, psychologists, anthropologists, and other academic fields. In the chapter "Liminality and Communitas," Turner defines liminal individuals as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony."⁷ For Turner, the position of "betwixt" of the liminal phase corresponds to the segregation of individuals and communities. Individuals are removed from their society and identity, entering into a period marked by ambiguity and disorientation. During the liminal stage, individuals have no property, position, status, or role in society.

Turner used the concept of liminality to describe tribal and non-tribal societies. He conducted his fieldwork with the Ndembu in Zambia. During his research with the Ndembu's tribe, Turner commented that liminality served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences. Turner's work has been criticized, by contemporary social theorists: Szokolczai, Thomassen, and Hovarth first for mostly

⁶ Van Gennep Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. (Routledge, 2013),20-21.

⁷ Turner, Victor. "Liminality and Communitas."

http://www.iupui.edu/~womrel/Rel433%20Readings/SearchableTextFiles/Turner_RitualProcess_chaps3&5.pdf

(accessed January 12, 2019).

focusing on small-scale tribal societies; second for being "apolitical." Contemporary social theorists point to the importance of the intersection of the term with history, politics, geography, etc. Another criticism of Turner's work was the positive quality that he gave to the liminal experience. Experiencing a liminal situation could be rather traumatic and cause a lot of anguish.

Contemporary scholars have argued that the liminal state, which in the past described a middle and transitory state, has become in modernity a permanent state. These group of scholars, composed of Thomassen, Horvath, and Szakolczai, agrees that liminal periods are characterized by uncertainty and fear. They also introduced the figure of the "trickster," which in many occasions is a politician who takes control in liminal times. The figure of the trickster appears as a leader who promised to solve society's main problems, but in fact he is responsible for destroying its people. These scholars have reintroduced the concept of liminality, giving new meanings and expanding the original concept into discussions of what we now know as permanent liminality. This concept suggests that liminality could be used to defined whole communities, movements, crises, revolutions, etc.

Social theorist Arpad Szakolczai's challenges the meaning of liminality as a temporary state and proposes that people and whole societies could be confined to "permanent liminality."

According to Szakolczai permanent liminality:

"Happens when a temporary suspension of the normal, everyday, taken for granted state of affairs becomes permanent, generating a loss of reality, even a sense of unreality in daily existence. The problem is not deviating from the "norm", as understood in a universalistic sense, but from whatever people living at a given time and place were taking for granted as normal and ordinary in their lives."⁸

For Szakolczai liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence (separation, liminality, and re-aggregation) becomes frozen as if a film stopped at a particular

⁸ Szakolczai, Arpad. "Permanent (trickster) liminality: The reasons of the heart and of the mind." *Theory & Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2017): 233

frame.⁹ The liminal phase predominates for a long period. Individuals and whole societies could remain "stuck in liminality." For Szakolczai, the figure of the trickster is interested in maintaining liminality, "as they can only gain influence under such condition of confusion and distress."

Bjørn's book *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-between* reintroduces the concept of "liminality" as an important tool for other academic fields such as social science and political theory. Bjørn builds on the work of van Gennep and Victor Turner, but proposes different ways in which the concept could be applied. He argues that in our current period liminality is characterized by the "permanentization" of the liminal state. Bjørn Thomassen proposes to go beyond Turner's concept of liminality and suggest that liminality is a powerful concept that could be applied to the experience of people going through wars, economic crisis, natural disasters, etc.

Thomassen points out:

Single moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs can be considered liminal. Liminal places can be specific thresholds; they can also be more extended areas like borderlands or, arguably, whole countries situated inconsequential in-between positions between larger civilizations. Liminality is also applicable to single individuals, larger groups, and entire societies.¹⁰

For Thomassen, all humans go through liminal experiences because they could take place anywhere and in any society. To explain his argument, Thomassen creates a model to categorize the different dimensions of liminality, and identify the different types of subjecthood, which include (single individuals, social groups, whole societies). He also categorizes the temporal dimension of liminality, which may involve moments, periods, or epochs, and in the spatial dimension (specific places, areas or zones, countries or larger regions). In this chapter, the author also explores the figure of the trickster in liminal situations.

⁹ Szakolczai, Arpad. "Liminality and experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events." *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 141-172

¹⁰ Horvath, Agnes, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, eds. *Breaking boundaries: varieties of liminality*. Berghahn Books, 2015: 48

Recent research has explored the concept of liminality in extended-stay hotels and motels. For example, “Liminal Living at an Extended Stay Hotel: Feeling ‘Stuck’ in a Housing Solution”¹¹ focuses on America's working poor who can't afford a house or apartment and are pushed to live in extended-stay hotels to avoid homelessness. The authors used the concept of liminality to explain the feeling of in-betweenness of the study's participants. The study highlights the experiences of low-income families who are trying to find affordable housing but cannot because of high housing costs in the United States. The participants in the study were responsible for paying all their hotel fees, and did not receive any assistance. The term liminality was used to describe the space of the hotel and the feeling of the resident of living in between home and the hotel room.

¹¹ Wingate-Lewinson, Terri, Hopps, J.G, and Patricia Reeves. “Liminal living at an Extended Stay Hotel: Feeling Stuck in a housing Solution” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 37 (2010):9.

CHAPTER II: PERMANENT LIMINALITY WITHIN A LIMINALITY

In 1899, a year after the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico, the island experienced one of the worst hurricanes in its history. Hurricane San Ciriaco killed over 3,400 people and destroyed coffee crops, at the time the island's primary source of income. The United States did not send any economic relief, instead they substituted the island's currency for the dollar. The U.S. government's response to this disaster is comparable to their response to 2017's Hurricane Maria. After more than a century of U.S. economic and political control of the island, colonialism and ethnic difference continue to shape its relationship with Puerto Rico. The federal government's discriminatory treatment towards Puerto Ricans is supported by law. Since the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico, a set of laws, from the Foraker Act of 1901 to 2016's PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act), has kept the island in a permanent liminal state. Looking at some of the historical junctures in the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, I will explore how the legacy of colonialism has perpetuated this liminality.

Bjorn Thomassen in *Breaking Boundaries* points out that "at its broadest, liminality refers to any 'betwixt and between' situation or object, any in-between place or moment, a state of suspense, a moment of freedom between two structured world-views or institutional arrangements."¹² According to Thomassen, liminality has spatial and temporal dimensions and can be applied to different subjects (individuals, social groups, and whole societies) and temporal dimensions (moments, periods, epochs). In this way, liminality applies to the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. The U.S. control over Puerto Rico has relegated the island to a permanent liminal state, which has been supported by political tricksters. I propose that Puerto Rico's permanent liminality should be analyzed as a story within a story: a permanent liminal state

¹² Bjørn Thomasse, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 7.

within a liminal state. Puerto Rico is arguably one of the oldest colonies in the world.¹³ More than a century ago Puerto Rico became an unincorporated territory of the United States, a possession, but not part of the United States. Since 1917, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens but do not enjoy equal rights as citizens in the States. Currently, under PROMESA, a Fiscal Board completely controls the island's economy and politics. Puerto Rico has experienced a permanent liminal state for over a century. However, within that permanent liminality, the island has experienced other forms of liminality such as the current economic crisis and Hurricane Maria.

Puerto Rican historian Pedro A. Cabán argues that after Spain ceded Puerto Rico, the United States did not lose a minute transforming the island into a military base and a profitable center for U.S. investors. His book *Constructing a Colonial People* looks at the importance of Puerto Rico in American history since 1898, focusing on the first three and one-half decades of U.S. colonialism. During this period the U.S. began the Americanization of the Puerto Rican people and the transformation of the island's institutions. The result was an uprising of independent movements that created a long-lasting political divide in Puerto Rico. A few months before the U.S. invasion, Spain had granted the island some political autonomy, but this autonomy was dismantled shortly after the occupation. The new government also had an Americanization plan to make English the primary language of instruction in Puerto Rico's schools and universities. The U.S. military government transformed Puerto Rico's political institutions, effecting its economy, culture and the whole society.

In 1901 the U.S. Congress passed the Foraker Act, making Puerto Rico an "unincorporated territory belonging to but not part of, the United States." The law was ambiguous. Puerto Rico did not have a clear path either to independence or statehood. The U.S. Congress denied Puerto Rico's representation in Washington and the U.S. President and Senate appointed the island's governors.

¹³ Monge, José Trías. *Puerto Rico: The trials of the oldest colony in the world*. Yale University Press, 1999.

The Foraker Act did not grant Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship; it supported the Americanization of the Puerto Rican people and the implementation of extractive institutions to benefit U.S. interests. The Foraker Act allowed Congress to organize U.S. rule over Puerto Rico “by imposing a tariff on goods coming from the island, it was treating it as not part of the United States. Through the Foraker Act, Congress both affirmed U.S. rule over Puerto Rico and defined the island as foreign territory.”¹⁴ The Foraker Act set the foundation for the U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial relationship. By denying Puerto Ricans full citizenship and political equality, the new government left the island in a state of “in between-ness.”

Between 1901 and 1922, in a series of decisions known as the Insular Cases, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that Puerto Rico’s political status was that of an unincorporated territory that “belongs to but is not a part of the United States.”¹⁵ The Court also restated that the U.S. Congress had plenary powers over Puerto Rico. The per the Territorial Clause of the United States Constitution, “Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or the Property belonging to the United States.”¹⁶ According to Efrén Rivera Ramos, plenary powers means that the U.S. has exclusive power to make decisions over its territories. Also, plenary powers are “GENERAL POWERS of government, in contrast to the limited (or enumerated) powers that Congress may exercise over the states of the Union.” Rivera explains that Congress could exercise its power in a different way than over states.¹⁷ Today, Puerto Rico remains subject to the plenary powers of Congress.

The Insular Case of *Gonzalez v. William* (1904) was the “first case in which the Court confronted the citizenship status of inhabitants of territories acquired by the United States during

¹⁴ Ayala, César J., and Rafael Bernabé. *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 26.

¹⁵ *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901); *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, 258 U.S. 298 (1922).

¹⁶ U.S. CONST., Art. IV, Sec. 3, cl.2.

¹⁷ Rivera, Efrén. “Economic Crisis, Democracy And Rights: The Case of Puerto Rico,”

https://law.yale.edu/system/files/area/center/kamel/sela17_rivera_cv_eng.pdf, (accessed January 20,2019).

its deliberate turn toward imperialism in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ Isabel Gonzalez, a single and pregnant mother, migrated to New York City from Puerto Rico (1902). After her arrival at Ellis Island, Gonzalez was classified as an “alien immigrant.” The court ruled that Gonzalez was a “noncitizen national,” not an American citizen. She challenged the migration policy that classified her as an alien, arguing that she was a U.S. citizen. In 1904, the Court announced that Puerto Ricans were not aliens, and the United States could not deny their entrance. Although, it was not until 1917 that Congress granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans.

In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Jones-Shafroth Act, better known as the Jones Act, conferring U.S. citizenship upon Puerto Ricans. The Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Frank MacIntyre, commented that U.S. citizenship was extended to Puerto Ricans to “make clear that Puerto Rico is to remain permanently connected with the United States.”¹⁹ Rafael Ayala and César Bernabe argue that U.S. citizenship could be interpreted as an attempt to block the possibility for independence and maintain the island in a permanent state of coloniality.²⁰ For Pedro Cabán, the Jones Act was the United States’ response to the growing antipathy to colonial rule and the growing size and strength of the independence movement.²¹ Ultimately, the Jones Act granted some freedoms to Puerto Ricans, but the island remained an “unincorporated territory” without full self-government. Also, soon after the law was passed, the United States entered World War I. Many Puerto Rican men were drafted, even though they did not enjoy the full benefits of citizenship. In 1920, an amendment to the Jones Act established that all trade from one U.S. port to another could only be carried by a U.S. flagged ship. The amendment, known as the Merchant Maritime Act, or cabotage laws, applies to U.S. states and territories. The U.S. maritime industry is

¹⁸ Erman, Sam. “Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905.” *Journal of American Ethnic History*. Vol. 27, No.4, (2008): 2.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of War, 1916:18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*,11.

one of the most expensive in the world. The law privileges U.S. corporations, while Puerto Rico suffers the economic burdens. Since American flag ships have a monopoly on shipping to Puerto Rico and can essentially charge what they want, Puerto Ricans pay between 20% and 60% more for goods imported from the United States than they would pay on the mainland.²² In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the Jones Act became news. Many politicians and activists demanded an end to the century-old law. The current government waived the law for a short period, so the island could get the help it needed. A week later the law was restored, even though most of the island did not have running water. For nearly a century, cabotage laws have contributed to maintaining constant economic crisis on the island.

Puerto Rico's economic and political dependence on the U.S. left the island in a terrible position after the worldwide depression of the 1930s. Bernabe and Ayala describe the period between 1929 and 1938 as "one of the most turbulent periods of Puerto Rican history under the U.S. rule."²³ The effects of the Great Depression on the island were terrible. The financial crisis hit Puerto Rico just as it was reeling from the disastrous consequences of 1928's Hurricane Felipe. In 1932, the economic crisis in Puerto Rico worsened with the passing of Hurricane San Ciprián. The financial crisis brought to the island mass unemployment, hunger and disease. All institutions were affected. The sugar and coffee industry, which was Puerto Rico's primary source of income, went into crisis. Prominent political figures emerged from the crisis. Luis Muñoz Marín, first a member of the Partido Liberal, or Liberal Party and then the founder of the Partido Popular Democrático, Popular Democratic Party promoted new social reforms and the possibility of independence from the United States. Another critical political figure was Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader of the nationalist party. Albizu Campos organized civilian marches against U.S. colonial rule, some of

²² James, Dietz. *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*. (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987).

²³Ibid., 2009, 95.

them ending in civilian repression and death. The 1930s was a period of social, economic and political transformation, also characterized by mass poverty and repression by the U.S. government.

In Puerto Rico, the economic crisis caused acute poverty. Unemployment grew and, with it, the demand for better labor conditions and opportunities. The mobilization of sugar, tobacco, and needle workers around the island resulted in massive strikes. Nationalist leader, Albizu Campos, became an important figure for the labor movement. He “was the first to address Puerto Ricans as subjects capable of collectively remaking their polity independent of, or even against the will of, the United States.”²⁴ A controversial figure, Albizu Campos experienced great repression as the leader of a movement that promoted the independence of the island. In 1934, Albizu Campos led a strike demanding better wages for sugarcane workers that ended with an increase in their salaries. The U.S. reacted by installing a military governor and militarizing the police. During this period of unrest, two significant political repressions took place on the island. First, in 1935, at the massacre in Rio Piedras, four young nationalists died denouncing police brutality. Second, at the massacre in Ponce, a peaceful demonstration organized by the nationalist party to commemorate the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico and to denounce the imprisonment of Albizu Campos, ended with approximately 19 deaths and 200 wounded. The U.S began an era of repression and surveillance of the Puerto Ricans who supported the decolonization of the island.

In this context of political unrest, Luis Muñoz Marín started to play an important role in the politics of the island. Early in his career, Muñoz Marín supported the independence of Puerto Rico. He was the son of Luis Muñoz Rivera, an influential political leader. Muñoz Marín worked as a journalist in New York, where he was in contact with labor activists and involved in social movements. After abandoning his support for the island's independence, Muñoz Marín adopted the

²⁴ Ibid., 109.

idea of autonomy. In 1940, Muñoz Marín became the president of the Senate, and in 1948, he became the first governor elected by the Puerto Rican people. In 1952, Muñoz Marín proclaimed the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Muñoz served sixteen consecutive years as governor and six more years as a senator.

The political figure of Luis Muñoz Marín embodies the anthropological concept of “trickster”. Agnes Hovarth and Arpad Szokolczai have written extensively about permanent liminality and the character of the trickster. Both agree that the concept of the trickster is useful for analyzing sociopolitical conflicts. They observe that the figure of the trickster is present in most cultures, and is a peculiar in-between figure, a type of political leader that takes advantage of a situation of distress or crisis²⁵. During these periods of unrest, the figure of the trickster rises and takes advantage of people's emotions. Political tricksters take advantage of people living in liminality.

Before Muñoz Marín was elected governor of the island, then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover investigated the politician. Nelson Denis' book, *War Against All Puerto Ricans*, states that the FBI had damaging information on Muñoz Marín, and used the threat of releasing the documents to control the island's politics for almost thirty years²⁶. In a report the Federal Bureau of Investigations described Muñoz Marín:

"Luis Muñoz Marín, president of Puerto Rican Senate, alleged to have used Communist Party principles and leaders to gain political power during the elections of 1940, since then, for practical reasons, has not aligned himself with Communist. Described by reliable information to be intellectual with a bad case of 'Puerto Rico inferiority complex,' which results in Anti-American tendencies. He is not considered dangerous to point of note against the United States. Is known to be personally completely irresponsible; reported by reliable informants to be heavy drinker and narcotic addict."²⁷

²⁵ Hovarth, Agnes and Arpad Szokolczai. *Individualization as Depersonalization: Minority Studies and Political Anthropology*. Nationalism and Ethnic Politics. 23:01, 1-17. 2017.

²⁶ Denis, Nelson. *War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in Americas Colony*. (Nation Books, 2015).

²⁷ Denis, Nelson. *War Against All Puerto Ricans*. <https://waragainstallpuertoricans.com/2015/07/06/how-luis-munoz-marin-the-drug-addict-manipulated-the-fbi/>(accessed February 2, 2019)

Luis Muñoz Marín was a populist, described as the Father of Modernism. He was a critic of colonialism and a member of the Nationalist Party. However, he became the governor of a colony that heavily repressed nationalist party members. In 1948, he approved the Gag Law (Law 53), which made it a felony to either use the Puerto Rican flag in public or to sing “La Borinqueña,” an anthem classified as subversive. Muñoz Marín embraced a different route from independence and statehood, and instead asked Congress to adopt its constitution.²⁸ In 1950, Congress passed Public Law 600. Congress allowed Puerto Ricans to draw their own Constitution, but the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico remained as defined by the Jones Act. Puerto Rico was still subject to Congressional plenary powers. After two years, Congress and the Puerto Rican people approved the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Neither independent nor a state, instead it prevailed as a colony with plans for development. Luis Muñoz Marín and his party (the PPD, or Partido Popular Democrático) played an important role in the implementation of Operation Bootstrap and the island’s Commonwealth status.

Operation Bootstrap was an industrialization project to modernize Puerto Rico's economy. The idea was to shift the economy of the island from agriculture to industry. Proponents of Puerto Rican industrialization characterized Operation Bootstrap as a strategy designed to create employment and economic growth. The government acknowledged the importance of infrastructure for faster economic growth and development. The building of infrastructure required a significant investment, and for the government of Puerto Rico, there was no other solution than to seek foreign investment. In exchange, American corporations that relocated to the island enjoyed tax exemptions and capitalized on the lower wages paid Puerto Rican workers. During its heyday Operation Bootstrap was described as an "economic miracle." Puerto Rico was showcased as an example of progress overcoming poverty. Yet, beyond the apparent success of the program, this

²⁸ Ibid., 2007. p 162

period of modernization mostly benefited corporations, while the island's economy became more dependent on the U.S. government. Operation Bootstrap's success helped some, still many Puerto Ricans migrated either to Puerto Rico's major cities or to the United States because there were not enough employment opportunities.

In the article, "Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap: Colonial Roots of a Persistent Model for 'Third World' Development," Deborah Berman, analyzes and challenges some of the previous work that mostly focused on the program's failures and successes in Puerto Rico. According to Berman, Operation Bootstrap was important for establishing Puerto Rico's loyalty to the United States. The program was designed to "perpetuate colonial dependence and control as a model for economic development throughout the world."²⁹ Berman argues that Operation Bootstrap is still being used as a model of development for other countries because, even though most academics and economists agree that the program was a failure for Puerto Rico from an economic angle, for Washington and the Puerto Rican political elite it was favorable. For her, the political alliance between the P.P.D (at the time the leading political party) and Washington was significant for several reasons. First, Operation Bootstrap helped to undermine the independence movement. Second, Puerto Rico's political status changed from a colony to a Commonwealth. Third, the economy shifted from an agrarian to an industrial economy that benefited U.S. interests. Berman claims that the creation of the "Estado Libre Asociado," or Commonwealth, succeeded as an economic development strategy. The Commonwealth, a new political status approved by Congress and chosen by the Puerto Rican people, gave the impression of decolonization. Washington, however, holds the same influence and power over Puerto Rico's political and economic sovereignty.

²⁹ Berman, Deborah. "Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap: Colonial Roots of a Persistent Model for "Third World" Development. *Revista Geográfica* (1998) 88.

In 1952, the Puerto Rican people ratified the Commonwealth of Free-Associated State ("Estado Libre Asociado" in Spanish). After two years and many changes, the U.S. Congress approved the new political status. Commonwealth was a liminal status between independence and annexation as a state. It allowed Puerto Ricans to elect their government and take part in economic and legal decisions without federal intervention but respecting the U.S. Constitution. The Commonwealth gave Puerto Ricans more participation in government and institutions, while the U.S. remained in control of their citizenship, and their economic and political future. Puerto Rico remained an "unincorporated territory," under absolute control by the U.S. Congress. The Commonwealth was not a transition between a previous political status to another one. Instead, it gave the false belief that the Puerto Rican people could eventually decide whether to become independent or a state. Under the Commonwealth, Puerto Ricans' political status transitioned from a liminal situation into permanent liminality. In 1953, the United Nations removed Puerto Rico from its list of 'non-self-governing territories.'" The illusion that the island was no longer a colony of the U.S. diminishes its lack of political freedom. Since 1952, Puerto Rico has gone through five referenda. None of them succeeded in changing the island's political status.

Today, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is in economic crisis, struggling with unpayable debt. After more than a century of U.S. colonialism, Puerto Rico has grown economically dependent on the U.S. According to Diane Lourdes Dick, U.S. practices are a form of economic imperialism. She demonstrates that the U.S. has used tax laws to advance the interests of U.S. corporations, while denying Puerto Rico's economic and political autonomy. Consequently, the island can't raise enough revenue, and, thus, the government must borrow money to continue its operation.³⁰ Dick points to the self-interested tax laws imposed by the U.S. as the main cause of

³⁰ Dick, Diane. "U.S. Tax Imperialism in Puerto Rico"
<https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1729&context=faculty>
(Accessed February 10, 2019)

Puerto Rico's financial and economic problems. For over a century, the federal government has granted tax incentives to benefit U.S. investors. The most recent incentive began in 1976 and ended in 1996. Section 936 of the Internal Revenue Code was a tax exemption for U.S. corporations that relocated to the island. Like Operation Bootstrap, at the beginning of the program, the manufacturing sector grew rapidly on the island, creating many jobs. Eventually, however, Section 936 became unpopular as corporations benefited more than the Puerto Rican people. In 1996, President Clinton ordered the phasing out of Section 936. Over next ten years multinational corporations began transferring their plants to other countries with better economic incentives and tax breaks. Puerto Rico's economy plummeted as a direct consequence of the congressional phaseout of these tax incentives.

Since 2006, Puerto Rico has experienced an economic and fiscal crisis. The Puerto Rican government continued to borrow money from Wall Street and other institutions. In 2015, then governor of Puerto Rico, Alejandro Garcia Padilla, declared the island's public debt was unpayable and asked Congress to provide a route towards bankruptcy. Puerto Rico as a territory of the U.S., however, cannot legally file for bankruptcy. The Puerto Rican government had no other solution than to adopt austerity measures. For example, new sales taxes were imposed, thousands of government employees were laid off, and cuts in pension funds, health, education, and infrastructure were made. After more than a decade without economic growth, the island's economy continues to shrink, while its debt continues to grow.

In June 2016, the U.S. Congress passed a law known as the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA, in English, means "promise"). Under PROMESA, a Fiscal Control Board practically sidelined the Puerto Rican government. The Board makes fiscal decisions and creditor negotiations, superseding the authority of the Puerto Rican government. As a result, the autonomy of the Commonwealth has weakened. The primary goal of

PROMESA is to restructure Puerto Rico's public debt to secure debt repayment. In order to pay the debt, the Fiscal Control Board has imposed numerous measures that have affected most of the island's institutions and its people. The Fiscal Board is composed of non-elected functionaries that enjoy more power than the Puerto Rican government. The Fiscal Control Board can approve or decline the island's annual budget. It is also in charge of restructuring the debt and has the power to decide if the island can file for bankruptcy. Under PROMESA, Puerto Rico's economy continues to contract, and its people face the consequences of austerity measures. For example, the Fiscal Board has reduced social spending while increasing taxation, affecting poor people the most. The austerity measures imposed in the aftermath of the most extended economic crisis have increased unemployment, poverty and continue to fuel massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the States.

According to Bjørn Thomassen, natural disasters are an example of liminality in a large-scale setting. He uses the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, in which 70,000 died, as an example. This event had long term consequences for its survivors. Similarly, Hurricane Maria was a liminal moment with lasting effects. Today, almost two years after the hurricane, many families continue to wait for the government's aid to rebuild their houses. The island continues to experience blackouts, and more people are migrating to the United States. Hurricane Maria is, without a doubt, one of the most devastating disasters not only on the island but for the entire Caribbean. More than 3299 people died, even though the government of the U.S. does not admit the death toll.³¹ Hurricane Maria disrupted the lives of an entire society, not only on the island, but also for Puerto Ricans worldwide. After the entire communication system collapsed, the migrant community of Puerto Ricans waited for days to communicate with their family and friends on the island. Hurricane Maria not only affected Puerto Rico, but also changed the lives of other Caribbean

³¹ Kishore, Nishant, Domingo Marques, Ayesha Mahmud, Matthew Kiang, Irmay Rodriguez, Arlan Fuller, Peggy Ebner et al. "Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria" *New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no.2 (2018), 162-170.

people who lost family members and friends.

The history of Puerto Rico under the United States' colonial and economic control entails greater complexities than those I have briefly discussed in this chapter. Nevertheless, exposing some specific historical junctures about Puerto Rico's political status and the effects of colonial capitalism elucidates the effects it has on the island after Hurricane Maria. Currently, Puerto Ricans are receiving less federal assistance than any other State after an environmental disaster. In addition, the U.S. government has failed to approve funding for food stamps, leaving many Puerto Ricans living in precarious and vulnerable conditions.

Hurricane Maria exposed the problems inherent in the island's colonial relationship with the United States. Puerto Rico's permanent liminality under the United States began over a century ago. The U.S. government and Puerto Rican politicians have made sure to maintain its permanent state, by depending economically and politically on the United States. The prolonged economic crisis and the most current assault on Puerto Rico, PROMESA--the act which, ultimately, controls the economy and led to the institution of austerity measures--has caused great harm to the Puerto Rican people

CHAPTER III: TESTIMONIOS IN LIMINAL SPACES: PUERTO RICAN WOMEN LIVING IN EXTENDED-STAY AND SHELTER HOTEL IN NEW YORK CITY

Thousands of Puerto Ricans who came to the United States to flee Hurricane Maria's devastation settled in New York City. Amongst the massive wave of refugees were many low-income female-head-of-household families. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) program provided temporary housing to qualified families and individuals displaced by Hurricanes' Maria or Irma. New York City's extended-stay and shelter hotels served as a temporary refuge for Puerto Rican families. Focusing specifically on female-headed Puerto Rican families displaced by Hurricane Maria, who resided in these extended-stay or shelter hotels, I aim, through their "testimonios," to show how these women felt delegitimized. As Puerto Rican migrants, these women did not feel their needs were legitimate; they were only valid because of the needs of their children, United States citizens. While these mothers attempted to build a home in extended- stay and shelter hotels, the city's government and FEMA reminded them that as Puerto Ricans they are second-class citizens: United States citizens by law, yet, very much, Other. Displaced Puerto Rican mothers embraced the discourse of motherhood and traditional gender roles that had shaped Puerto Rico's colonial history to resist that message.

This study focuses on the testimonios of six Puerto Rican mothers who, after Hurricane Maria, got tired of waiting for aid to arrive in Puerto Rico and sought refuge in New York City. These women commented that their situation was one in which they were always waiting. Before Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans waited for the economy to improve. Then they waited for the storm to arrive. After Maria's devastation, people waited for the restoration of the water, electricity and communication system. Weeks passed by, and Puerto Ricans waited in long lines for gasoline,

food, ice, and cash. Desperation started to rise, and thousands of people began to wait at the airport. Among the thousands waiting were these six mothers, who fled Puerto Rico with their children. Puerto Rico was not the only place in which the government forced women to wait; their waiting surpassed the space of the island. Displaced Puerto Rican women testimonios are about their experiences while waiting in the liminal space of extended-stay and shelter hotels.

Displaced Puerto Rican mothers located their narrative within the parameter of the home. In the extended-stay and shelter hotels, women performed their role as mothers. From the oppressive space of their temporary home, women denounced their treatment as second-class U.S. citizens. The participants consistently repeated, "Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens," and reflected on the United States' discrimination towards Puerto Ricans, or specifically, FEMA's discriminatory treatment towards them. In addition to questioning the U.S. response to Hurricane Maria, in comparison to other environmental disasters in U.S. history, these women, from the liminal space of their rooms, conformed to their self-sacrificing role as mothers. Concerned with their children's future, while exposing the consequences of Puerto Rico's economic crisis, Hurricane Maria's devastation, PROMESA, and the unbearable effects of austerity measures, the participants embraced the discourse of motherhood in the absence of the support from the U.S. government.

On September 16, 2017, Hurricane Maria, a Category 5 hurricane, made landfall in Puerto Rico. The devastation of Hurricane Maria revealed to the world that the United States, one hundred and twenty years after the colonization of Puerto Rico, continues to treat its colonial subjects as second-class citizens. U.S. citizenship does not translate into equality and does not guarantee the respect of human rights. Why did the Federal Government treat displaced Puerto Rican women living in extended-stay and shelter hotels and their children different than other U.S. citizens? There are many answers to this question, in which gender, class, and citizenship intersect with Puerto Rico's long history of colonialism.

Since October 30, 2017, FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance program began to provide temporary shelter to thousands of Puerto Ricans families and individuals in more than a thousand hotels in the United States. Of the hundred and ten participating hotels in New York, twenty-three hotels and motels were in the boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. For eleven months, FEMA paid the cost of participants' hotels and motels. FEMA and the Puerto Rican government prioritized people living in emergency shelters for TSA assistance. Applicants were required to register online. However, as most of the island did not have electricity, the majority of Puerto Rican refugees applied once they were in the United States. Applicants also needed to verify their identity and the location and occupancy of their home, as it had to be located in a TSA-approved area. As the applicants were already displaced from their home, they needed to personally contact participating hotels and motels to verify their availability.

Once approved, the refugees were able to check in and provided with an end date of their stay. FEMA covered the cost of the room and taxes, except for incidentals and meals. FEMA regularly communicated with the participants to let them know in advance the assistance deadline. Participants were reminded by FEMA, via telephone, email, text message, and sometimes in person, of the temporality of the programs. Through their calls and visits, FEMA's Case Managers insisted on the importance of return to Puerto Rico, by either moving in with family on the island or otherwise finding permanent housing. FEMA's insisted on finishing the TSA's program numerous times, which made very nervous the participants of the program because they could end up in a homeless shelter anytime.

In addition to the TSA program, FEMA created a program called Transportation Assistance. For the first time in history, FEMA provided transportation to families to travel to the United States and to return to Puerto Rico. FEMA paid for the cost of airfare for families and individuals as well as baggage fees. FEMA had shifting deadlines for the ending of the TSA

program. Finally, on September 14, 2018, Judge Timothy Hillman denied the enforcement of the government to continue providing temporary shelter. Puerto Ricans families were ordered to check out of the hotels.

Every week, for almost a year, displaced Puerto Rican women living in extended-stay and shelter hotels received a robocall, to remind them that they would have to either find permanent housing or return to Puerto Rico. Every time FEMA announced the end of the TSA program, mainstream media published multiple articles about struggling, poor Puerto Rican mothers with health problems. In these interviews, women embraced the motherhood discourse to legitimize their migration and access to resources. These women also commented on their desired to find employment, rejecting the stereotype of the “welfare queen,” and denouncing the U.S. government for not treating them and their children as U.S. citizens.

Major media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Gothamist* and *Huffington Post* drew attention to the plight of displaced Puerto Rican mothers in extended-stay hotels in New York City, particularly on their limited time to find permanent housing. Most interviews were with low-income displaced women in extended-stay hotels, with little mention of families who arrived in New York City and were sent directly to shelters. However, the media did cover the city's mismanagement and the abandonment by the Federal Government. New York City's Mayor, Bill de Blasio, first commented that the city would not abandon Puerto Ricans. Although the Mayor also commented that the city would offer health and education support, housing would be the responsibility of Puerto Rican migrants. In October, Mayor Bill de Blasio said: "I don't want to encourage people to come here if they don't have some family to turn to."³² Unaware of New York City's housing crisis, many displaced Puerto Rican women thought that

³² <https://www.amny.com/opinion/columnists/mark-chiusano/puerto-rican-hurricane-victims-are-about-to-lose-an-important-support-1.19432378>

permanent housing in New York City would be more accessible. For example, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Daiza Apontes Torres, mother of two, commented: “In Puerto Rico, we were told by FEMA that we were going to be welcomed in New York with open arms. But that hasn’t been our experience.”³³ There were many women who, like Apontes Torres, desperately searched for affordable housing and employment.

Even though most media outlets interviewed women, there is no mention of how gender, race, ethnicity, and class intersect, and how these interstices affect Hurricane Maria's refugees. The media failed to acknowledge the long history of Puerto Rican women's migration to New York City and their treatment as second-class citizens. The media failed to acknowledge the long history of Puerto Rican women's migration to New York City, their contributions to the city, and their concurrent struggle with housing and employment, while being treated as second-class citizens

Methodology

Puerto Rican women’s testimonios carry the story of many other Puerto Rican migrant women, who in the past also struggled with poverty and inequality. According to Virginia Necochea, a testimonio is:

Qualitative narrative form that puts forth powerful messages that carry a sense of urgency. Testimonios speaks to an individual's experiences that resound across groups of people. Testimonios especially speaks to oppression and marginalization and thus have been historically used in the struggles of people of color.³⁴

Testimonios are a powerful tool widely used by disadvantaged Latin American women to speak out about their own oppression and that of their people. Two of the most recognized testimonios are from indigenous women in Latin America: Rigoberta Menchú’s *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, and Domitila Barrios de Chungurra’s *Si me Permiten Hablar*. Their testimonios’ express urgency, in

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/opinion/refugees-puerto-rico-hurricane.html>

³⁴ Necochea, Virginia. "A critical educator’s testimonio against the current post-racial fallacy: A call to action." *Regeneración Tlacuilolli: UCLA Raza Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016)

order to denounce the abuse towards indigenous communities. "The objective of the testimonio is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action."³⁵ Typically written in the first person these testimonios address, the marginalization of entire communities. "Although a testimonio is technically an account made by one person, it represents the voice of many whose lives have been affected by a particular social event."³⁶ The method of the testimonio was crucial for my research; it helped me document the experiences of displaced Puerto Rican women after Hurricane Maria. The participants in the study had two weeks left in the hotels. Their stories speak of the reality of a neglected population who migrated to the United States after Hurricane Maria and lived between home and homelessness.

In order to recruit participants, I placed flyers outside hotels in Queens and kept in constant communication with front desk staff who knew all the Puerto Rican families that lived in the hotel. Six Puerto Rican women agreed to participate in the study. Out of the six participants, four lived in extended-stay hotels and two in shelter hotels. As I conducted the study at a very crucial moment, when women were dealing with the possibility of homelessness, asking participants to reflect on their story and lives was at times very emotional. Thus, precautions were taken to minimize risk. The participants were contacted beforehand through a licensed social worker that lived in the hotel and was in constant communication with them. The fact that I'm a Puerto Rican woman living in New York City, gave the participants a sense of trust; this was invaluable in establishing good communication.

The testimonios were audio-recorded and analyzed after transcription. All names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the participants' identity. After transcribing the testimonios, the data was analyzed, using a technique for conducting thematic analysis. This method was

³⁵ Reyes, Kathryn Blackmer, and Julia E. Curry Rodríguez. "Testimonio: Origins, terms, and resources." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 45, no. 3 (2012), 525.

³⁶ Reyes, Kathryn Blackmer, and Julia E. Curry Rodríguez. "Testimonio: Origins, terms, and resources." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 45, no. 3(2012).

discussed in great depth in Johnny Saldaña's book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, in which he explains how in vivo codes are a useful tool for summarizing each participant's experiences. The testimonios are divided in three categories, and each participant's data was analyzed for those themes. The first one, "Todo por mis hijos," which translates into "all for my children," highlights how women used the discourse of motherhood to justify their migration to New York City. Also, the participants' commented on their struggles while mothering in a liminal space. These mothers seemed anxious to control their children's well-being. The ideology of intensive-motherhood is useful to understand a mother's commitment to child rearing. Another emerging theme was "no regresamos," which means "not going back." This theme presents the displaced women's decision to remain either in the United States. Participants commented on their motivations to stay and the implications of Puerto Rico's economic crises. The last theme is "somos ciudadanos Americanos," meaning "we are U.S. citizens." This last theme, stresses women's frustration, anger and confusion with New York City's and the Federal Government. The participants' critique FEMA for their unequal treatment as colonial citizens. The themes help highlight specific phrases in women's testimonios. Labelling included women's language, to accentuate the importance to voice their experiences. The themes selected characterized the experience of the participants, and they frequently appear in each of their testimonios.

The women in the study were either born in Puerto Rico, or born in the United States and moved to Puerto Rico as children. The respondents lived in the hotels between eight and eleven months. Most of the participants are in their 40's, two of them lived with their parents and children, four of them lived with their children only, and one participant lived with her husband and children. Of the six women, one had a job and the rest of them were unemployed.

The reasons each participant moved to New York City and lived in the hotels varied. Some

of the reasons included health problems or the need to take care of disabled children and sick parents. Most of them described the precarious conditions of the island after the hurricane, but also pointed out that they were already considering a move to the U.S. because of Puerto Rico's prolonged economic crisis and its concurrent, dramatic affects on the healthcare and education system. Before living in the hotel, some participants rented a house, others lived at their parent's homes and two of them lived in public housing. At the time of the interview, four out of the six women lived in the same hotel. However, at some point all of them lived in the same extended-stayed hotel in Queens.

The Hotel Springhill Suites New York LaGuardia Airport is an extended- stay hotel located in Corona Queens, New York City. The hotel is close to the Queens Museum and the airport and has eight different types of rooms. Some participants stayed in what it is called the Suite, a 289 square foot room with a mini- refrigerator, stovetop and a king-sized bed. Other participants remained in the one-bedroom suite, which accommodates four people. It has two beds, a stovetop, and a living room separated from the beds by a wall. The hotel offers daily breakfast for guests. Breakfast was served in the lobby which became a social space for the women and their children. They described the extended-stay hotel as fantastic because they had a kitchen and the staff was like "family". In contrast, the women living in the shelter hotel were frustrated with its space limitations, lack of a kitchen, and the fact that shelter residents could be evicted for breaking curfew time.

Testimonios

Esmeralda Santiago's autobiography, *Cuando Yo era Puertorriqueña*, the first part of a trilogy captures the displacement of one Puerto Rican family, headed by a woman, from rural Puerto Rico to New York City. Through the eyes of Negui, the protagonist, we see the failure of the modernization process in Puerto Rico and the displacement of the family through liminal spaces. The traditional, humble Puerto Rican house is replaced with a modern cement house in the City. The new Puerto Rican family follows the U.S. model of domesticity. However, the protagonist's family doesn't subscribe to the "perfect" family; her parents were not married, and her father has other children with different women, consequently, the family struggled with illegitimacy and poverty. After struggling economically in the City, her mother moves to Brooklyn with her daughters. The constant changing of spaces reflects Puerto Ricans' permanent liminality. Santiago exposes the hybridity of her character, always negotiating Negui's identity as a Puerto Rican migrant woman.

Santiago's autobiography emphasizes the importance of making a home anywhere, no matter the circumstance or place, just as the testimonios of the women I interviewed did. In describing the liminal space of the hotels as home, these women located themselves in the domestic sphere, where they performed their traditional roles as mothers. They talked openly about their struggles, as mothers, and denounced their treatment by FEMA. The limited space of the extended-stay and shelter hotels is a metaphor of women's limited options as colonial subjects. The participants lived in between Puerto Rico/New York, home/homelessness. For the participants hotel room symbolized home and their liminality. Within that space they shared their stories of struggle.

Four interviews took place at the extended-stay hotel and two at the park near the shelter hotel. The two interviewees who lived in the shelter hotel commented on the importance of

creating a space that simulated their house in Puerto Rico. Jennifer remarked:

“My children are everything to me, even though we don't have stability. For the moment, the shelter is our home. We are living in a small room, but I have my children. I wish you could see my room. I'm a very clean person, and for this reason, everybody likes me in the shelter. I'm this way for my children, especially my oldest daughter. I decorated the room; we got sheets to separate a tiny space for her. I wanted my daughter not to feel less than her friends in school. I needed to make this place feel like home, if not, it would be very frustrating to wake up every day.”

Jennifer's testimonio took place in a public space, but her narration comes from that small and uncomfortable space she refers to as home. The shelter hotel was her temporary home, as she waited for the city to approve her application for an affordable housing voucher. Jennifer is responsible for taking care of the household and childcare, while her husband works as a barber in Manhattan. For her, the most challenging part of making her temporary shelter feel like a home was the lack of access to a kitchen. New York City's shelters don't have kitchens, only microwaves for frozen food. Jennifer hid a rice cooker under her bed because they're not allowed to cook in the bedrooms, due to safety concerns. The rice cooker helped her prepare some of the basics, such as rice and oatmeal, for her daughter. Jennifer worried about how unhealthy the regular consumption of frozen food is, as well as how expensive it is to eat in New York City in general.

Alejandra, an unemployed mother of two, also spoke of the importance of making a home anywhere you go. Alejandra “did not want to get too comfortable in the hotel, in case [they] were sent to a shelter.” After eleven months and multiple transfers between extended-stay and shelter hotels, she recognized that the wait for public housing in New York City was lengthy. At her shelter hotel, she hung family photos and the Puerto Rican flag on the walls. “I don't have anything in Puerto Rico; the only thing I have left is my children,” Alejandra said. While she did seek employment, her options were limited because she did not complete her university degree. Moreover, as her schedule orbits around her children, finding the right schedule was a challenge.

Thus, Alejandra's work was keeping her children safe

All interviewees repeatedly emphasized the importance of sacrificing for their children: *todo por mis hijos*. In her 1996 book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, sociologist Sharon Hays described "intensive mothering" as a women's commitment to raising their children. Intensive mothering started in the 1980s as a response to the increase in the number of women entering the labor force. The media promoted the ideology of intensive mothering as the good model of motherhood: the re-domestication of the new professional woman through motherhood. This ideology focuses on white middle-class mothers who spend all their time and energy improving their children's lives. "There is an underlying assumption that the child absolutely requires consistent nurture by a single primary caretaker and that mothers is the best person for the job."³⁷ Women are destined to be the primary caretaker of children. The ideology of intensive mothering limits women's agency and perpetuates their subordinated position.

In Puerto Rico, liberal male elites in the nineteenth-century sought to similarly limit women's agency by transforming them into perfect mothers of the nation, essential for the patriarchal model of the "La Gran Familia Puertorriqueña," the Great Puerto Rican Family.³⁸ The myth of la gran familia exalts Puerto Rico's past under Spanish rule and the male figure is presented as a benevolent father who keeps control over its submissive wives, sons, and daughters. The narrative denies class, racial differences, and turn women into perfect mothers of the nation. Other strategies imposed by the U.S., after the colonization of the island, prioritized the traditional construction of the Puerto Rican family. The island's political parties and the Catholic Church have also played an essential role in promoting motherhood as a women's primary identity.

Puerto Rican migrant women in New York City embraced motherhood as their primary

³⁷ Hays, Sharon. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. (Yale University Press, 1998), 8.

³⁸ Findlay, Eileen. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. (Duke University Press, 1999).

identity. Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol's book *From Colonia to Community* is one of the first to focus on Puerto Rican migrant women in New York City. One chapter highlights the critical role that Puerto Rican migrant women played in the early communities. For Sánchez Korrol, women were crucial in retaining ethnicity through the transmission of language, customs, and cultural traditions. She argues that even though women played an essential part in developing new communities and joined the labor force, their traditional role as mothers was what many of them valued most. Since then, little has changed. Puerto Rican migrant women, by and large, continue to carry all the pressure to raise their children.

The displaced Puerto Rican mothers I interviewed explained that they moved to New York City because they wanted quality education and medical care for their children. These women are entirely responsible for their children's well-being. They position themselves as mothers first. Some of them commented on their commitment to give everything they had to their children. They made frequent references to their migration as an act of sacrifice for their children. Kathy shared:

I left the island immediately after the hurricane. The situation in Puerto Rico is terrible. Crime is increasing. Schools and hospitals are closing. Everything I do is for my children. All the sacrifice, moving here, changing from one place to another. Believe me, it's not easy. Somedays I'm depressed, but my sons are always there. They're my strength. All I do is for them, for their future.

Kathy is the mother of three teenage sons, two of which lived in the extended- stay hotel with her. She was unemployed and taking English classes to get prepared to become a phlebotomist. Kathy's strength emerged even after a natural disaster, economic crisis and possible homelessness. Regardless of the anxiety, she expressed about FEMA's constant calls and her uncertain future, she never abandons the motherhood discourse, resisting FEMA's message that they're not welcome in the city.

The women in the study commented on the importance of finding employment and housing. Elena said, "My daughters are everything to me. My primary goal is to find a job and a more stable

place to live. As a mother, you have to sacrifice many things, in order to give your children a better future.” Similarly, Alejandra commented, "My children come first. They're the ones that motivate me every day.” Every morning as I look at them, I’m reminded that all the sacrifices are worth it. I want to find a job and a stable place to live. I want my children to be happy." They repeatedly commented on the difficulties in finding employment. Some of them pointed out that they had difficulties finding a job due to their children’s disabilities, while others remarked on their desire to finish their college degrees.

Historically, Puerto Rican women struggled to find employment in New York City. In the 1950's Puerto Rican women entered a decaying garment industry, where they experienced discrimination. According to Alice Colón-Warren, poverty in Puerto Rican female-headed-households was influenced by "English language skills, presence of small children, access to family networks, and homeownership."³⁹ The garment industry in New York City temporarily solved women's needs for jobs. The shift from an industrial economy to a market economy, impacted Puerto Rican migrant women, who has more difficulties accessing white-collar jobs and education. Colón-Warren’s comments that welfare benefits provide some "possibility of resistance to further deterioration in employment and economic conditions." However, welfare benefits only offer limited help to women struggling to survive in conditions of poverty.

During the testimonios, the women stressed the importance of finding a job. They did not want to depend on the government's welfare. "I want to find a job,” Kathy expressed, “I don't want to depend on welfare." Kathy rejects the welfare mother stereotype. The welfare mother stereotype is discussed in great detail by Laura Briggs. Briggs explains that the sociological work by Oscar Lewi's, *La Vida*, characterized Puerto Rican women as hypersexual and as bad mothers. During the

³⁹ Ortiz, Altagracia. *Puerto Rican women and work: Bridges in transnational labor*. (Temple University Press, 1996),130.

1980s and 1990s, the stereotype of the "welfare queen" was assigned by the conservative government to blame poverty on black and Latina women.⁴⁰ Based on the Moynihan report, poor, single mothers should not have access to government assistance because it would cause family breakups and damage the traditional family model. These derogatory representations were widespread in media and books causing long term damage.

Throughout the testimonios, the mothers expressed their decision of not returning to Puerto Rico, "No regresamos," not going back. The participants pointed out how they were affected by the cuts in health care and education on the island. Austerity measures have ravaged Puerto Rico's health system. The government has closed many hospitals and cut funding for social services. The results of this has been devastating. "I'm the mother of two girls. One of them has multiple sclerosis," Yadira, one of my interviewees, revealed. "After Hurricane Maria, staying in Puerto Rico was not an option. I left all my belongings behind and immediately moved. It's tough to think about what's going to happen tomorrow, but my daughter's health and well-being is my priority." Yadira shared the difficulties of having a disabled child in Puerto Rico. Sometimes her daughter needed to wait up to a year for a medical appointment.

Many women who left Puerto Rico reflected on the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria. The island's weakened infrastructure and institutions collapsed. Kathy explained:

I had been thinking about moving to New York for years, but you always feel that you want your child to grow on the island with their family. But after the hurricane, I decided to move to New York. We had no electricity, no running water. The hospitals were closing, and people were dying. There was no food in the supermarket, and the lines to get cash from the banks could take hours. People were desperate; I was desperate. I'm not returning to an island where my kids don't have a future.

Kathy and her children lived in Puerto Rico's public housing. After Hurricane Maria, they traveled

⁴⁰ Briggs, Laura. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. (University of California Press, 2002).

to New York thanks to FEMA's transportation aid program. She lived with her two teenage sons, who were enrolled in school. Kathy worried about her children's emotional health because they did not speak English and were delayed a year in school. Other mothers also worried about their children's struggles in school. The participants expressed concern about the location of the school, and their children's access to after-school programs. Having someone to support their children with school work was essential, as they did not speak English.

Jennifer is not planning to return to the island. Two weeks before the hurricane she discovered that she was pregnant. She lives with her husband and their two children. Jennifer left the island because her family lost their house. Jennifer did not want to give birth in Puerto Rico because "I did not feel secure. I was afraid of having an emergency; the closest hospital was almost an hour away. There was barely access because some of the streets collapsed." Jennifer lived in an extended hotel for several months. However, after one of the many deadlines that FEMA gave to the families to check out of the extended-stay hotels, she took all her belongings and left with her family to the shelter hotel. She is currently unemployed and taking care of her newborn baby, who was born with disabilities and requires all her attention. She hopes, eventually, to build her own daycare practice, here in New York City. For Jennifer and her family "Our future is here, and my home is here now."

The interviewees felt little hope for Puerto Rico's current economic situation, and thus for their return to the island. They would visit their family there but make a home here. The slow recovery after the hurricane and the lack of opportunities were essential factors in their decision. Some of them commented that if they could not find housing in New York they would move to another state. According to a report by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, an

estimated 135,000 Puerto Ricans relocated in the United States six months after Hurricane Maria.⁴¹

The report focuses on the number of students enrolled in schools in Florida, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Illinois. Currently, Florida is the state which has received the most Puerto Ricans after the hurricane. New York came in third place after Pennsylvania.

Another theme that arose was "Somos Cuidados Americanos," we are U.S. citizens. The participants' voiced their frustration with FEMA's constant calls to remind them about the imminent expiration of the TSA program. Elena commented:

You do not understand how difficult it is to think that my children could end up in a homeless shelter. Every time that FEMA calls to offer a ticket back to Puerto Rico I get very nervous. We are just asking for the same treatment as any other American citizen. Sandy victims were allowed to stay in hotels almost two years after the hurricane. But, we as Puerto Ricans don't have the same right. We can't even vote for an American president. Look what Trump did, it was disrespectful to all Puerto Ricans.

The participants asked for the same treatment that U.S. citizens in the United States had after environmental disasters. Hurricane Maria exposed the character of the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The status of the island became a news headline. The President's treatment towards Puerto Ricans during his visit to the island highlighted the unequal treatment. The President blamed the colonial subjects for their own predicament! "I hate to tell you, Puerto Rico, but you've thrown our budget a little out of whack because we've spent a lot of money on Puerto Rico⁴²," President Trump said.

Maria's parents lived and worked in New York for thirty years; they retired a few years ago

⁴¹ "A New Report Estimates that more than 135,000 Puerto Ricans have Relocated to U.S. Six Months after Hurricane Maria." Center for Puerto Rican Studies, <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/events-news/news/new-report-estimates-more-135000-puerto-ricans-have-relocated-us-six-months-after> (accessed February 10, 2019)

⁴² Trump: "I hate to Tell You Puerto Rico But You Have Thrown Our Budget A Little Out Of Wack." https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2017/10/03/trump_i_hate_to_tell_you_puerto_rico_but_youve_thrown_our_budget_a_little_out_of_whack.html (accessed January 20, 2019)

and returned to the island. After the hurricane, they decided to come back to the U.S because her dad has heart problems. First, they stayed with family, but this was untenable, due to lack of space. When they learned about FEMA's program, the family applied and moved to the hotel. "We get very stressed out every time that we receive FEMA's call. My dad, he has heart problems, he gets very nervous. We don't understand how they can mistreat us, my parents worked for this city for over 30 years. We are U.S. citizens who have contributed to this nation," Maria commented. Maria described her current emotional state as depressed and anxious. FEMA's deadline put a lot of pressure on women, who did not know what to do next. Going back to Puerto Rico was not an option for them.

The psychological effect of Hurricane Maria and women's liminal situation put a lot of pressure on them. Elena's exposed:

Our position is very depressing. I'm a U.S. citizen, why are FEMA and the U.S. government treating us as unequal citizens? They're continually calling us. Sometimes it's a robocall, other times a real person. They offer a ticket back to Puerto Rico. They also ask what is our five-year-plan. The only thing I know is that tomorrow I could end up in the street with my children, and they're asking me about my plans in five years.

Elena expressed her frustration with the government of Puerto Rico and the United States. She was very stressed about the possibility of homelessness. Elena and her daughters already experienced shelter-living in New York City. According to Elena, residing in a shelter was a "nightmare; that place was not suitable for children." Elena was worried about people with substance abuse and mental health problems. A report by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools found that, in the 2016-2017 school year, nearly one in ten elementary-age students struggled with homelessness, in comparison to 7.3 percent of middle and high school students. The report also highlighted that ninety-five percent of students living in a shelter for three or more years were

black or Latino.⁴³

There are many historical reasons for displaced Puerto Rican mothers to feel frustrated about their liminal situation. Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in 1898, as a consequence of the Spanish American War. In 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship. Puerto Ricans fight in American wars and contribute to the U.S. economy. However, Puerto Ricans can't vote in presidential elections and enjoy fewer constitutional rights than other U.S. citizens. Hurricane Maria and the U.S. Federal government's response exposed Puerto Ricans' second-class treatment. Puerto Rican's lives as U.S. citizens are valued less. After the hurricane, Harvard University published an article on the death toll attributed to Hurricane Maria. The initial government estimate was sixty-four deaths, but the number was actually closer to four thousand five hundred. Hurricane Maria was one of the deadliest hurricanes in recorded history.

While struggling in liminality, the Puerto Rican mothers I interviewed, and their children, experienced political and social abandonment. "They don't care about us," Maria said. The participants felt they were treated as a burden. FEMA's calls reminded them of their exclusion in a city where there is no space for the poor. "The government abandoned us," Yadira commented. After Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans used the word abandonment to refer to the Puerto Rican government's inaction and the United States' late response to the disaster. The participants in the study could not understand why Puerto Ricans were treated differently than other U.S. citizens after a natural disaster. Hurricane Maria illustrated the government's indifference and neglect of its citizens. The Federal Government's response is similar to the one for Hurricane Katrina. The Puerto Rican and African American experience are rooted in inequality.

⁴³Homelessness Crisis Exact an Especially High Price on New York City's Youngest Students. [https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2019/02/27/202141/\(accessed](https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2019/02/27/202141/(accessed) March 20, 2019)

Conclusion

The urgency of the testimonio served to voice displaced Puerto Rican women's struggles while living in the liminal space of extended-stay and shelter hotels. Two weeks before FEMA's deadline to finish the TSA program, Puerto Rican women narrated their frustration and anxieties about living in between home and homelessness. The participants, displaced Puerto Rican women used the motherhood discourse to resist FEMA's message that they were not welcome to New York City, and to claim education and medical care for their children. From their hotel room, a space that they called home, and in which they live in liminality, between home and homelessness, the participants exposed their struggles as colonial citizens. The testimonios of these six Puerto Rican women are evidence of the U.S. unequal treatment towards Puerto Ricans. This study can lead to developing the concept of liminality further as it applies to multiple research areas. The testimonios was a helpful tool to record how Puerto Rican women struggle with gender, migration, race, and citizenship.

Table 1: List of Participants

Name (Pseudo-nyms)	Age	Number of Months Living in the Hotel	Number of Children	Marital Status	Living Arrangements	Education
Kathy	45	9	3	Divorced	2 Children	2 years nursing school
Elena	42	8	2	Single	1 child	High school
Yadira	35	10	3	Single	3 Children	High school
Jennifer	28	10	2	Married	Husband, 2 children	High school
Maria	40	11	1	Married	Mother and Father	High school
Alejandra	46	11	2	Married	Mother, Father, and 2 children	2 years administration

Table 2. Participant's Living Situation

Kathy	Prior to the hurricane, Kathy lived in Puerto Rico's public housing with her three teenage children. The father of her children is in jail. They moved to New York two months after the hurricane. They already lived in New York City's public housing previously for a short period. As Hurricane Maria refugees, they moved three times between extended-stay hotels and shelter hotels. The family did not have their own funds to rent a place and received Temporary Aid for Needy Families Program (TANF).
Elena	Before the hurricane, Elena rented a house and lived with her two daughters. She lost her job and moved to New York City with her young disabled daughter. This was Elena and her daughter's first time in New York City. They lived in two different hotels. Her poor credit has made renting an apartment in New York difficult and she is seeking help via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
Yadira	Yadira as a house in Puerto Rico, but after the hurricane, she migrated with her two daughters. One of her daughter's has multiple sclerosis. She has visited New York several times because she has family in the city. Initially they move with some family members, but they were living in a basement making their situation difficult to manage. After learning about the TSA program, they moved to an extended-stay hotel. Allison cannot afford an apartment in New York, due to their low-income.
Jennifer	Jennifer lost her home after the hurricane; she was pregnant and immediately moved to New York City with her husband and daughter. They cannot afford an apartment in the city, but her husband is working; they received a voucher from the city to help them pay for housing. The family has moved three times from hotels and are currently living in a shelter hotel.
Maria	Maria lived with her elderly and sick parents in Puerto Rico. She and her parent moved immediately after the hurricane and stayed at her brother's house. She lived in New York many years ago. Maria's son and husband are in Puerto Rico, waiting for her to find an apartment. Maria and her parents have moved to three different hotels. She's currently working, but her poor credit makes finding a rental difficult.
Alejandra	Alejandra takes care of her two elderly parents and two children. She lived in New York City before but moved to the island to care for her parents. She is unemployed and cannot afford an apartment at this time. Alexa has no income, and is working towards completion of her bachelor's degree within the next year.

Table 3. New York City's Hotel List

Manhattan	Brooklyn	Queens	Bronx
Best Western Plus Kitchen-No	Delz Bed and Breakfast Kitchen-No	Hillside Hotel Kitchen-Yes	Bronx Guest House Kitchen-No
Fairfield Inn and Suits Kitchen-No	Hilton Brooklyn NY Kitchen-No	Wingate By Wyndham, Jamaica Kitchen-No	Holiday Inn Express Bronx Kitchen-No
Madison LES Hotel Kitchen-No	Holiday Inn Express Kitchen-No	Holiday Inn Manhattan View Kitchen-No	Bronx Guest House Kitchen-No
Mid-Town Convention Center Kitchen- No	Park House Hotel Kitchen-Unknown	Anchor Inn Bayside New York No Kitchen	Rodeway Inn Kitchen- Unknown
	Red Lion Inn and Suites Brooklyn Kitchen- No	Holiday Inn LaGuardia Airport Kitchen-No	
	The Pointe Plaza Kitchen-Yes	Springhill Suites Kitchen-Yes	
		Airway Inn Kitchen-No	
		La Guardia Plaza Hotel Kitchen-No	
		Best Western Queens Court Hotel Kitchen-No	

IV. CONCLUSION

The United States' significantly slower response to the plight of the Puerto Rican people after Hurricane Maria put a spotlight on their second-class treatment. FEMA and the local government's inefficiency was exposed in its incapacity to supply food, water, gasoline, and medicine. The failure of the electric grid (deteriorated due to the island's prolonged crisis), left nearly the entire island without electricity. Hurricane Maria accelerated the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States; many of them already struggling with the effects of austerity measures. This traumatic event led to the massive migration of the most unprotected: the sick, the elderly, the poor, women and their children. The United States' inefficacy illuminated discussion on the island's colonial status and the unequal treatment towards Puerto Ricans. Archaic laws such as the Jones Act, and newer laws, like PROMESA, maintain the "second class" status of the island. The aftermath of the disaster brought up other controversial topics such as the island's inability to declare bankruptcy. Hurricane Maria highlighted the economic, political, and migration crises that existed long before the devastation.

Many, if not all, of these crises stem, in some way, from the permanent liminal state of the island. There is a potential for the application of permanent liminality across historical junctures in the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. I mined the concept of permanent liminality, from its anthropological origins through to its more current iterations by contemporary social scientists, who encourage its historical and political applicability, to have a better understanding of individual experiences.

Permanent liminality is fundamental in the lives of Puerto Ricans, as is especially evident in the lives of the women I interviewed. The main concern of this study is to highlight the struggles of displaced Puerto Rican mothers living in extended- stay and shelter hotels in New York City.

Notably, the multiple liminal spaces that these women inhabit. Hurricane Maria negatively impacted women's lives, due to the social construction of gender norms. Puerto Rican women are expected to take care of the children, persons with disabilities and family members. In this study, poor Puerto Rican mothers living in extended-stay and shelter hotels used the genre of the testimonio to narrate their struggles and resist FEMA's unequal treatment. The participants were living in between what they described "home," which was the hotel room, and homelessness. These women suffered anxiety every time they received a call from FEMA, reminding them of the TSA program's impending deadline.

Research on women living in liminality after an environmental disaster is lacking, and, thus, this work attempts to give a space to voice the testimonios of struggling communities. Assessing the effects of living in between home and homelessness, from an individual experience to a whole society, serves to address the needs of these vulnerable communities. However, to accomplish this, researchers need to highlight the effects of U.S. colonialism and Puerto Rico's lack of economic and political independence, in addition to the island's financial crises and the Fiscal Board's austerity measures. With the massive Puerto Rican female migration, it is also imperative to research their experiences and struggles, not only in New York City but also in the rest of the United States. This could help us understand the effects of living in permanent liminality.

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