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**EL DESPERTAR: A JOURNEY INTO COLONIAL EXPERIENCE**

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Curriculum and Instruction

By

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ABSTRACT

The research project described here theorizes my own lived experience. This process is guided by the works of researchers who have made their lives a “source of inquiry” (Anzaldúa 1987; Negrón-Muntaner, 1994; Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; Richardson, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Alvarez, 2001; and Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006) in order for readers to hear my inner voice as I reflect about the cultural and educational world that has shaped me (Ladson-Billings, 1997). By doing this, I aim to start decolonizing my mind as I uncover issues that are relevant to members of the colonized and marginalized communities that I am part of.

The main reason why I have chosen to pursue such a project is to illustrate the ways in which English, the language that I have chosen to teach others, and which in my country has become associated with U.S. colonial power, can be appropriated and used for the empowerment of my people. By appropriating the language and making it my own, English stops being the language of the colonizer and becomes a language of liberation that can be used to resist and denounce colonial experience. Therefore, in this dissertation I use personal and professional experiences to explore Puerto Rican colonial experience and the tensions that emerge from it in order to connect my personal experience to that of Puerto Ricans as a people.

Even though English teaching in P.R has been studied from a variety of historical, critical, socio-cultural and post-colonial perspectives, a perspective that has been long overlooked is that of the Puerto Rican Spanish native speakers who teach English on the Island. This is an area that deserves to be studied because it can potentially empower those responsible for teaching English to Puerto Rican students. Studies that empower members from historically marginalized groups are important because they help us understand how local appropriations of
languages and discourses associated with colonialism provide tools to develop teaching pedagogies that take into account the challenges and possibilities that members from minority communities face. Accordingly, these explorations can help teachers better understand the ways in which they contribute to the oppression or emancipation of their students and communities at large.

To this end, the self-study explores my ownership of the English language as I use the language to share my encounters with colonial experience which illustrate how this appropriation serves as an act of ongoing empowerment that helps overcome the legacy of silence fostered in my historically colonized and marginalized communities. While existing literature is rich theoretically and politically, it does not specifically deal with the specific colonial experience of Puerto Rican English teachers. Therefore, throughout the research I draw on concepts from Post-colonial Theory, Latina Feminism, English Language Teaching (ELT), and Critical Pedagogy which contribute to the framing of a theory that fully encompass Puerto Rican colonial reality. That said, this theory supports the argument that even within the most constraining colonial relationships or conditions, Puerto Ricans have been able to resist their colonial condition and empower themselves through the negotiation and appropriation of the languages and discourses that have historically marginalized them. Consequently, when applied to English language teaching, such a perspective fosters the sharing of these strategies that have been useful to negotiate the cultural and linguistic tensions present within our colonial context. Finally, this perspective also calls for English teachers to reflect on their teaching strategies so that they can accommodate the immediate needs of their students in order to bring about meaningful change to English teaching.
The results of this study agree with those of Canagarajah (2003) whose work explores how appropriation and redefinitions of the English language by members of minority communities\(^1\) contribute to their empowerment as well as for the democratization of English. According to him, this alternative is beneficial for English as well as for teachers and learners of the language because it contributes to resisting the colonial discourses surrounding English and ELT. These results suggest that when minority communities appropriate English and infuse their local cultures and languages into the language, these communities contribute to the reconstructing of English. Moreover, this presents learners with the opportunity of questioning not the reasons why they should learn English but rather on how they will do it. When minority teachers and learners engage in this type of questioning, their own knowledge about their cultures, conditions and uses of the language contribute to the transformation of English. Accordingly, this approach contests the notion that English should be viewed *only* as a colonial/hegemonic language. By viewing English as such, English then becomes a tool of liberation for minority speakers who as owners of the language are no longer excluded from the Inner Circle of English speakers.

These views are fundamental for the decolonizing perspective to English teaching developed for this project because it presents an alternative for English non-native teachers who wish to empower themselves by appropriating English to uncover, denounce and share the tensions present in the ELT field. Furthermore, by acknowledging these tensions I can become more reflective in my English teaching practice. As I acknowledge my ownership of English, I become more reflective in my practice as I become aware of the struggles and needs that I share with my students. Moreover, this awareness helps me become more sensitive to the issues,

\(^1\) By minority communities, Canagarajah is referring to peoples from Outer Circle of English countries. In other words, those whose first language is not English.
strengths and limitations that my students bring into the classroom. This sensibility helps me develop teaching strategies that draw on my students’ strengths rather than on their weaknesses. By engaging in this type of teaching I am embracing the possibilities that a decolonizing perspective to English teaching can offer to my English language learners. Finally, a decolonizing perspective to English teaching gives me the opportunity to share my ideas and strategies with the larger English teaching community, and by doing so I am actively contributing to the transformation of English and our students.
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P.R.  Puerto Rico
U.S.  United States
ELT  English Language Teaching
ESL  English as a Second Language
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INITIAL/FINAL THOUGHTS

This research inquiry illustrates how complicated colonial experience is. It does so from point of views based on my experiences as a Puerto Rican woman, researcher and experienced English non-native teacher. The study described here is intended for anyone who wants to decolonize their research and teaching practice. It illustrates how personal and professional experience may become research, and how teachers can combine doing research with other aspects of their lives. Further, it points to how colonized peoples might research their own professional practices. I hope this project guides readers to view research and teaching differently, as this work aims to share a decolonizing perspective to research and teaching and the possibilities it presents for members of colonized and marginalized communities. Furthermore, this project also illustrates ways in which colonized individuals appropriate languages and discourses associated with power to negotiate their own empowerment. Decolonizing projects like this open the doors to new spaces that take the social, the cultural and the personal into account.

Since this research project is an exercise on resistance, throughout the entire dissertation I use first-person pronouns because this way of writing research goes against normalized academic writing practice which has historically alienated indigenous and colonized peoples. I rely on this type of writing to stop privileging researchers from particular social and cultural groups. Furthermore, this type of writing allows me to share my self-positioning in the world and how this positioning influence the educational issues that are critical to me, and the theoretical framework and the methodology that I chose to investigate these issues. By doing so, I hope I contribute to change views on what is valued as knowledge and research and what this means for researchers who are product of colonized and marginalized communities. Finally, this type of
writing also allows readers to reflect and consider new ways of knowing, research, teaching, and learning.

Throughout this self-study I have discovered that colonial experience has profound and everlasting effects in teachers’ lives. Colonial experience affects personal relationships with loved ones, friends, co-workers and even teaching pedagogy. This inquiry has given me the hope that from now on, I will be able to lead a lifelong reflective teaching career where I can teach English using a Freirian approach. I also hope to engage in collective projects that encourage Puerto Rican English educators to focus more not on those challenges that are rooted on linguistic aspects of English language learning, but on those related to our colonial relationship to the U.S. We have overlooked these for too long. As educators, we must create room for dialogue among both teachers and learners because many Puerto Ricans enter the English teaching profession without realizing how many aspects of the colonial background of English and of our own colonial history are overlooked when we are trained as English teachers. By bringing dialogue into our teaching practice, we are not only rejecting the traditional model of education that Puerto Rican teachers and students have experienced all of their lives, but we are also working towards a liberatory, problem posing education that will eventually change the basis of our curriculums on the Island and help our students become critical thinkers and not passive receivers of knowledge.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

“In 1898, los Estados Unidos invaded Puerto Rico, and we became their colony. A lot of Puerto Ricans don’t think that’s right. They call Americans imperialists which means they want to change our country and our culture to be like theirs.”

“Is that why they teach us English in school, so we can speak like them?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m not going to learn English so I don’t become American.”

He chuckled. “Being American is not just a language, Negrita, it's a lot of other things.”

Esmeralda Santiago, When I was Puerto Rican, 1993

The journey metaphor in this study

The preceding citation best summarizes some of tensions described in this dissertation. I have placed it here for the reader to better understand how my journey to become a credentialed academic and how this journey is related to the colonial history of my people and to the ways through which I have gained understanding of the world and of the role of English in Puerto Rico (P.R.). Therefore, in this research project I explore Puerto Rican colonial experience and how it has and continues to shape me as a Puerto Rican woman and an English teacher. Thus, I rely on the metaphor of a journey to describe and critically reflect on the process that teaches me to value myself as a Puerto Rican English teacher.

The idea of using a metaphor to guide the descriptions in this research project has been inspired by the book Metaphors We Live By (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003), which argues that “our conceptual system is inherently metaphorical” (p. 184), a fact that makes metaphors useful tools for people. Metaphors serve to both explain and understand complex concepts and processes that happen in the world. Since this is an exploration of the complexities inherent in the life of a woman from a colonized background, I am relating my becoming aware of Puerto Rican colonial experience to a journey. This allows me to explore the type of negotiations that I have engaged in
across different social groups and geographical locations. By doing this, I can better reflect on how these negotiations have been contingent on movement.

Therefore, my use of the journey metaphor serves as an invitation to readers to accompany me as I revisit the social spaces and geographical locations that have shaped me and where power relationships are being constantly negotiated. Throughout the dissertation, I rely on the recalling, retelling and reflecting on this journey through autobiographical writing. This type of writing allows me to fully explore the impact that colonial experience has had in my life. According to Ellis (2004), when people read autobiographical pieces of writing, it helps them understand their own stories sociologically. I hope that by engaging in this type of writing and research, I can accomplish this goal.

**Project Rationale**

Scholars who have studied the development, learning and teaching of English connect English and colonialism (Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994; Pennycook, 1998; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Canagarajah, 2003). Furthermore, Pennycook (1998) claims that English language learning presents a fundamental dilemma to its learners since it is “both the language that will apparently bestow civilization, knowledge and wealth on people and at the same time is the language in which they are racially defined” (p. 4). At present, an example of this can be seen in the way that English has become associated with United States (U.S.) power and domination. Accordingly, this association of English with power has led to tensions regarding the degree of ownership of English that its speakers have and to the questioning of the efficiency of the English non-native speaker as a teacher of the language. English is thus perceived as owned only by the English native speaker, leading to perceptions of the English non-native speaker as
inferior and as someone who will never own the language as the native speaker does. These views support the idea that an English native speaker is a better teacher of English regardless of the qualifications of an English non-native both as a speaker and teacher of a language that they master.

However, existing linguistic research informs differently. In 1982, Moag proposed four categories of English using societies: English as a native language (ENL); English as a basal language (EBL); English as a second language (ESL); and places where English is an additional language (AL). Based on this classification, English is taught accordingly. Indian linguist Braj B. Kachru contested this categorization by developing the Non-Native Englishes model to explain the spread of English around the world and justify his championing of World Englishes. According to his model, English spreads through three circles: (1) the Inner Circle, which is composed of countries where English is spoken by the population as a first language and has an official status, which includes Great Britain, the U.S, Canada, New Zealand and Australia; (2) the Outer Circle, where English is spoken as a second language, has official or semi-official status, and is mostly composed of former British and American colonies such as India, Singapore; Malaysia, Sri-Lanka, the Anglophone Caribbean, Philippines and many African countries; and (3) the Expanding Circle, which is composed of countries where English has no official status but is recognized as a language of power. Some of these places are Japan, China, Germany, Russia, and countries in Latin America.

Kachru’s model places Puerto Rico (P.R.) in the Outer Circle as a U.S. colony (Pousada, 2000). The reality of the Island is that even when English has official status, the language of choice of Puerto Ricans remains to be Spanish. The safeguarding of Spanish as the language of everyday life, in spite of the official status of English, promotes English in P.R. as (1) a tool of
opportunity and liberation (Urciolli, 1998); (2) the oppressive instrument of the colonizer (Algren de Gutierrez, 1987; Pousada, 1999; Santiago, 2008); or (3) the “Trojan Horse of U.S. hegemony” (Walsh, 1991; Antrop-Gonzalez, 2000; Torres Gonzalez, 2002). Regardless of the perceptions that Puerto Rican people have of English, an aspect worth noting here is that those responsible for teaching English to Puerto Rican students are, in their majority, Puerto Rican Spanish native speakers. According to Pura Cotto\textsuperscript{2}, a former Director of English Instruction in P.R., the Puerto Rican Department of Education employs about 12,000 English teachers who are mostly native Spanish speakers (Hay Brown, 2004, p. 1).

This fact leads me to wonder about the extent to which the U.S./P.R. colonial relationship impacts English teachers’ perceptions of the language that they teach in P.R. In other words, have Puerto Rican Spanish native speakers and teachers of English conformed to the assumption that English is owned by the English native speaker, an assumption that perpetuates the idea that the English native speaker is the best model for English teacher on the Island.

Even though English teaching in P.R has been studied from a variety of historical, critical, socio-cultural and post-colonial perspectives, a perspective that has been long overlooked is that of the Puerto Rican English teacher on the Island. This is an area that deserves to be studied because it can potentially empower those responsible for teaching English to Puerto Rican students. Studies that empower members from historically marginalized groups are important because they help us understand how negotiations and appropriations of languages and discourses associated with colonialism provide tools to develop teaching pedagogies that take into account both the challenges and possibilities that members from minority communities face.

\textsuperscript{2} Former Director of English instruction in the P.R. Department of Education in an interview with Matthew Hay Brown of the Hartford Courant (April 26, 2004).
Accordingly, these explorations can help teachers better understand the ways in which they contribute to the oppression or emancipation of their students and communities at large.

Puerto Rican English teachers need to reflect on the impact that the colonial discourse associated with English (Phillipson 1991; Pennycook 1998; Canagarajah, 2003) and the responses to this discourse might have in lives and in their English teaching practice. To this end, this research project argues for the appropriation of the English language by non-native speakers to illustrate how this appropriation serves as an act of ongoing empowerment that helps overcome the colonial mindset fostered in the field of English language teaching (ELT) as well as in our historically colonized and marginalized communities.

The main reason why I have chosen to pursue such a project is to illustrate the ways in which English, the language that I have chosen to teach and which in my country has become associated with U.S. colonial power, can be appropriated and used for my empowerment and that of my people. By illustrating the ways in which English can be appropriated, I illustrate how colonial languages can be transformed into tools of liberation that can be used to denounce and resist colonial experience. Therefore, in this dissertation I use my personal and professional encounters with colonial discourses and languages to explore the tensions that emerge from these intersections while connecting my personal experience to that of Puerto Ricans at large.

Theoretical framework of this dissertation

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is best viewed as a decolonizing one. To develop this framework, I am drawing on theories of post-colonialism, English language teaching (ELT), critical pedagogy and Latino Studies. While the terms “post-colonial”, “ELT”,

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3 Puerto Ricans, women and English non-native speakers.
“critical pedagogy” and “Latino Studies”, serve as an umbrella for a variety of theoretical approaches adopted by researchers who are interested in decolonizing research, learning and teaching practices, in the present study I draw on the similarities that they all share. Of particular interest to me is the focus on explorations of historical and social constructions of knowledge, their relation to power, colonialism, and hegemony (cultural and linguistic), and the ways in which these play out in the field of English education. In this study, I also give particular attention to a decolonizing approach to research, and English teaching and learning. As a member of historically colonized and marginalized groups, I find Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) work particularly useful here because it allows us to reinterpret the term indigenous people as a group of peoples who “share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives” (p. 8). This approach forces us to conceptualize the term indigenous research as one applicable to my communities and thus to the present research.

As a female Puerto Rican English non-native speaker and teacher, one of the reasons why a decolonizing approach to research is useful to me is because the theories and methods that I am drawing on are well known for exploring alternative ways to studying historical and social constructions of knowledge and their impact on particular groups’ social conditions and lives. This perspective also draws on explorations of power relations and their influence on the type of knowledge and experiences that are legitimized and accepted as true within certain settings (Weiler, 1988; Weiner, 1998; Weedon, 1999; Smith, 1999; Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006). Consequently, these understandings are valuable for a decolonizing perspective because they help me to sort out the complexities inherent in the

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4 Women, Puerto Ricans and English non-native speakers.
knowledge construction process, a process which is essential in establishing the researcher in a
decolonizing project. By doing so, I illustrate how journeying from the colony to the land of the
colonizer triggered an internal personal and professional journey of awakening to colonial
experience. Even when the process had already begun on the Island, it was the actual act of
physically moving away from the colony what fostered my receptiveness to new ways of looking
at who I was and the social world that had constructed me.

In addition, drawing on critical pedagogy and Latino Studies theories is also useful for
this study because it allows me to understand how schooling validates or invalidates minority
students’ experiences, ways of knowing and language abilities. Critical pedagogy also helps me
understand how as members of a social group, we value some forms of knowledge more than
others. Due to the notion of knowledge being “heavily dependent on culture, context, custom
and historical specificity (McLaren, 1989, p. 174), critical theorists conclude that knowledge is
symbolically created in the minds of people based on the type of experiences, interactions and
schooling that individuals experience as members of society. Hence, the analytical perspective
that I am developing for this study draws on these understandings to define knowledge as the
information, facts, skills, experiences, perceptions, values and assumptions that are internalized
by an individual as a member of a particular social group.

When applied to the field of education, this analytical perspective assumes that the
experiences and interactions that students have in school lead them to understand how the world
around them works (Freire, 1970; McLaren 1989). This is attributed to the fact that as children
enter school, they spend most of their developing years surrounded by fellow students and
teachers. Moreover, their experiences and interactions with teachers and fellow classmates
contribute to their constructions of knowledge. Consequently, a notion from critical theory that is
applicable to this research is the idea that those in positions of power create and legitimize the knowledge that sustains the larger power structure. Most often, those who are in positions of power are going to create and support the type of knowledge that helps maintain the power structure that sustains them. In the same way, any questioning of the status quo or of the historical and/or social conditions shared by the majority is constantly being monitored in order to avoid any threat to the powers that be. Accordingly, those few in control restrict the knowledge that the majority of the people are exposed to as their means to maintain the status quo of society. The schooling process can be used as the means to ensure that the status quo remains in place by leading the many to embrace and support the power structure that sustains the few as it reaches future citizens.

However, the decolonizing perspective I am developing here also assumes that even within such a top-down notion of knowledge construction processes, there is still options for the oppressed. Top-down notions of knowledge construction can be negotiated and/or challenged from within. For this reason, the use of autobiographical writing is extremely useful for this researcher because it allows me to appropriate the knowledge and the language that I have acquired as a member of my communities and use them to describe the multiple levels of consciousness that I have as a woman, as a Puerto Rican and as an English non-native speaker. In addition, this approach allows me examine in depth the complexity of my colonized condition as I recall my knowledge construction negotiations and appropriations as a member of particular social groups. Several scholars (Reed-Danahay 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Schwandt, 2001, Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006) have found that these type of explorations are a very useful tool for researchers to examine their own communities from within. For this reason, I draw on auto-ethnography as conceptualized by Ellis’ and Bochner’s
(2000) who define it as “an auto-biographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). This notion is useful to me because it places the self within a social context. By doing this, I will move through my life journey in order to connect my individual experience to the broader social context that surrounds me. I hope that by doing so, I can teach others “how to sociologically “interview” themselves; how to tie personal experiences to historically situated circumstances; how to construct social/personal theory” (Ellis, 1997, p. 123).

**Research Questions**

The main question that will guide this inquiry into colonial experience is:

- What is the impact of colonial experience on a Puerto Rican English teacher’s life?

The questions that will help me explore and gain an understanding of this topic are the following:

- In what ways does a Puerto Rican English teacher negotiates her positioning in society in relation to her life journey?

- To what extent do appropriations of colonial languages inform language teaching practice?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided in seven chapters. The chapters are organized somewhat chronologically and thematically to ease the construction of the description of my journey to colonial experience. Each chapter combines poems, scenes, vignettes, and photographs to guide the reader through the analytical and reflective processes that I went through during different stages of this journey.
Throughout the entire dissertation I use first-person pronouns because this way of writing research goes against normalized academic writing practice which has historically alienated indigenous and colonized peoples. This type of writing allows me to share my self-positioning in the world and how this positioning influences the educational issues that are critical to me. Finally, this type of writing also allows me to connect my personal experiences with those of other Puerto Ricans which contribute to helping readers reflect and consider new ways of knowing, research, teaching, and learning.

In chapter two, I define the concepts that shape the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Concepts such as, post-colonialism, English colonial discourse, knowledge, power, hegemony, and Latina Feminism are defined and applied to Puerto Rican colonial experience in order to develop a theoretical framework applicable to this project.

Chapter three explores the usefulness of qualitative methods and especially of auto-ethnographic writing as tool of inquiry for researchers and teachers from colonized and marginalized communities.

Chapter four explores my gender construction process in P.R. through the use of auto-biographical writing which is used in the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter five explores the colonial initiatives implemented on the Island during the first years of both Spanish and U.S. occupation. It also explores the tensions and responses that such initiatives have had on Puerto Rican people.

Chapter six describes the tensions and responses to the presence of the U.S. and English in P.R. and how these impact and inform English learning and teaching on the Island.

Chapter seven describes the tensions, negotiations, appropriations and acts of resistance that Puerto Ricans in the U.S. have to engage in as they relocate to the Mainland.
Chapter eight closes the dissertation with a discussion of the results of this inquiry and pedagogical implications and possibilities that this type of research study has for English teachers from colonized and marginalized communities.
CHAPTER TWO:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework developed for this research project is described in this chapter. This study explores colonial experience from the perspective of a Puerto Rican English teacher. Given that this study examines the impact of colonial experience on an educator’s life and how it becomes manifest in her life and her teaching practice, the purpose of this chapter is to define the concepts that are crucial to this research and to the analysis of colonial experience from the perspective of a person who is product of historically colonized and marginalized communities. While existing theories are rich theoretically and politically, they do not specifically deal with the experiences of Puerto Rican female English teachers. Therefore, in this chapter I review scholarship from the fields of Colonial/Post-colonial Theory, ELT, Critical Pedagogy and Latino Studies to frame a theory that can be applied to the analysis of these experiences.

I have named this theory a decolonizing perspective to English teaching. This perspective supports the notion that even within the most constraining relationships or conditions, a colonized person can appropriate the languages and discourses that have oppressed and marginalized her and use them for her own empowerment. When applied to English language teaching, this perspective forces English teachers to re-examine their assumptions about English, its role in their communities and their own roles as English teachers. By doing so, they become more reflective and critical in their English teaching practice.

Since this research project argues for a decolonizing English teaching practice, it is necessary to begin our discussion with theories of colonialism/post-colonialism to consider which aspect of these theories are applicable to Puerto Rican colonial experience.
Colonial/Post-colonial Theory

Colonialism is the process by which powerful countries expand their domination by gaining political, economic, military, cultural and linguistic control over another country. As a result, the colonized country becomes a place where members of the colonizing country establish themselves in order to restructure, reshape and regulate what happens in that context. This situation establishes a co-dependent relationship between the two countries as they become dependent on one another. However, in this relationship, this co-dependence usually leads to a disadvantage for the colonized country and its people because the relationship usually leads to the exploitation of the colony’s natural and human resources. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2005) claim:

The perception of the colonies as primarily established to provide raw materials for the burgeoning economies of the colonial powers was greatly strengthened and institutionalized. It also meant that the relation between colonizer and colonized was locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference deeply resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social (p. 46).

An example of this can be seen in the colonial relationships established by the Spaniards during their colonization in the Americas. Once the Spaniards established their settlements, not only did they exploit the natural resources of the land, but they also exploited the original inhabitants of the Americas [its Indigenous population] as Spaniards enslaved them and abused them. An example of this can be seen in the way in which Taíno population of the Americas was decimated due to illnesses and Spanish violence against them, and on how the Spaniards easily replaced them with black African slaves as if they were animals or objects.

Obviously, such a relationship not only affects the country as a whole, but also those who inhabit that land. Hence, colonizer and colonized are both affected by this violent relationship as
they are both dehumanized, which is what Césaire (1955) identifies as the ‘boomerang effect’ of colonialism. He further explains:

They [colonizing campaigns] prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him as an animal, and tends to objectively to transform himself into an animal (p. 41).

Further commenting on the dehumanization brought about by colonialism, Fanon (1963) remarks:

Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm’s length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours (p. 15).

As the colonizers establish themselves in the colony, a series of changes are implemented in the attempt to establish order and control over the colony. This is done based on the belief that the colonized are inferior, and therefore, in desperate need of becoming civilized like their colonizer. This notion is evidenced by the following remarks:

The colonialist system permitted a notional idea of improvement for the colonized, via such metaphors as parent/child, tree/branch, etc., which in theory allowed that at some future time the inferior colonials might be raised to the status of the colonizer. But in practice this future was always endlessly deferred (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2005, p. 49).

Accordingly, when this belief is shared by the colonized, it supports the myth that the colonizer is superior to the colonized. Further commenting on how the colonized support this belief, Talpade-Mohanty (2004) writes:

Institutionally, colonial rule operated by setting up visible, rigid, and hierarchical distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized. The physical and symbolic separation of the races was deemed necessary to maintain social distance and authority over subject peoples. In effect, the physical details (e.g., racial and sexual separation) of colonial settings were transmuted to a moral plane: the imperial agent embodied authority, discipline, fidelity, devotion, fortitude, and self-sacrifice. This definition of
white men as “naturally” born to rule is grounded in a discourse of race and sexuality that necessarily defined colonized peoples, men and women, as incapable of self-government (p. 59).

In the past, the dehumanization and disempowerement brought about by colonization was deemed successful as long as the colonized conformed to these views. Furthermore, the colonized learned to become more accepting of the “civilized” model that the colonizer presented. Consequently, some of the colonized wished to become more like the colonizer. As Memmi (1965) explains:

The first attempt of the colonized is to change his condition by changing his skin. There is a tempting model very close at hand—the colonizer. The latter suffers from none of his deficiencies, has all rights, enjoys every possession, and benefits from every prestige. He is moreover, the other part of the comparison, the one that crushes the colonized and keeps him in servitude. The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him (p. 120).

As the theorists aforementioned suggest, in colonial relationships between countries, the colonizing country tends to dismiss local cultures by silencing their languages and ways of knowing as they promote their own [the colonizers] ideals, values and beliefs. Unfortunately, this leads to the silencing and marginalization of the colonized as they become more accepting of the colonizer’s beliefs, hierarchies and actions. Without a doubt, one of the most profound outcomes of colonial relationships is the silencing and marginalization of the languages, cultures and ways of knowing of the colonized which become manifest in the tensions that emerge from this complicated encounter.

Nevertheless, it is within this silencing and marginalization that the colonized negotiate alternatives that will enable them to respond and resist their constraining conditions. An example of this can be seen in the way in which colonized peoples articulate the tensions that emerge from colonial encounter. To fully understand these articulations, our discussion now turns to post-colonial theory.
Post-colonial/postcolonial theory⁵ has emerged as one means by which colonized peoples reflect on and express the tensions that developed from the complex blend of imperial language and local experience, which has existed long before the term was used by the overall tradition to describe it (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2003). The field initially emerged from within literary circles, as a response to the cultural interactions that surfaced while studying the controlling power of representation in colonized societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2005). Among the seminal works that shaped the field of post-colonial theory are those of Césaire (1955), Fanon (1963) and Memmi (1965) all of whom not only reflected on the material impact of colonialism, but also on the social impact that it has on both colonizer and colonized. It must be noted that even when post-colonial studies did not exist as a field per se, the work of these critics helped pave the way for the emergence of the field. Stemming from their wish to better understand their own colonial condition, through their work, this group of men resisted their colonial condition. Not only that, they also contributed to the decolonization of their countries and their minds by unveiling the damaging effects of colonialism while actively participating in their own countries’ struggles for independence.

For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to draw on Loomba’s notion of post-colonial. Loomba (1998) defines post-colonial as “a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena” (p.19). Needless to say, her definition is useful for this study since it supports the notion that all colonial relations are dependent on historical, geographical and cultural variations. Loomba’s notion of post-colonial supports an

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⁵ I will be using both terms interchangeably. The field of post-colonial studies has been under disciplinary dispute [especially for the use of the prefix post] ever since the field’s beginnings (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2005). While I acknowledge these tensions, I have chosen not to focus on the disciplinary tensions existing in the field but rather focus on drawing on those ideas from within the field that can help me develop an analytical perspective that can be applicable to the present research.
emphasis on the importance of context when investigating colonial relations because even when
the colonial experience has universal characteristics, every context experiences colonialism
differently. As Loomba (1998) asserts:

The word postcolonial is useful in indicating a general process with some shared features
across the globe. **But if it is uprooted from specific locations, ‘postcoloniality’ cannot
be meaningfully investigated, and instead, the term begins to obscure the very
relations of domination that it seeks to uncover (emphasis mine, p. 19).**

Thus, in order to investigate these relations of domination embedded in the discourse of a Puerto
Rican English teacher, it is necessary to make connections between the general features of
colonial discourse and the specific colonial discourse existing within the context of P.R.

To understand the use of the term “colonial discourse”, it is necessary to define discourse
as understood by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2005), who attribute the development of the sub-
field of colonial discourse theory to Michel Foucault. According to these scholars, Foucault’s
definition of discourse is strongly related to social knowledge because to him [Foucault],
discourse is a “system of statements within which the world can be known” (p. 70). According to
his view, a discourse develops as a consequence of the knowledge that a person has about a
person, a group, a culture, or a relationship. Further elaborating on discourse, Brookfield (2005)
adds:

A discourse is partly a set of concepts that are held in common by those participating in
that discourse community. It includes rules for judging what are good or bad, acceptable
or inappropriate contributions and procedures that are applied to determine who may be
allowed to join the discourse community (p.137).

That said, to elaborate on how the notion of colonial discourse is useful to my research, I must
now turn to the work of Edward Said who with his book *Orientalism* (1978) would forever
revolutionize the field of post-colonial studies. His work is considered to be fundamental in the
development of the area of colonial discourse theory and analysis (Williams and Chrisman,
1994) because while *Orientalism* acknowledges the tensions inherent in colonial and oppressive relationships, it also criticizes the ongoing universal assumptions about the Orient that reiterated European superiority over Oriental backwardness. Said’s book not only examines the way in which colonial discourse functioned as a mechanism of power, but it also acknowledges the dangers of perpetuating the use of these colonial discourses upon ourselves and others as well. Its significance within the field lies in the fact that this work uncovered how dominating discourses worked on colonized peoples.

Said’s scholarship added a new dimension to the field of colonial/post-colonial studies and his work provides me with a theoretical base from which to investigate, analyze and validate the experiences of those who [like me] are products of colonized contexts. As Said (1978) explains:

> Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition, I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabulary available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line (p. 73).

Said’s work with colonial discourse is central to post-colonial theory as it establishes the grounds for a better understanding of the East and West relationship as one based on power and domination. Said’s analysis is also important because it connects understandings of knowledge with power. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2005) explain:

> Discourse is important, therefore, because it joins power and knowledge together. Those who have power have control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not. This link between knowledge and power is particularly important between colonizer and colonized (p. 72).

When one applies Said’s arguments as presented in *Orientalism* to the context of P.R., one can see that the colonial discourse and the practices related to “Americanization” were based on assumptions that U.S. administrators had about Puerto Ricans. An example of this can be seen
in the work of Negrón-Muntaner (2004) who examined how Puerto Ricans’ displays of ethnic and national identity have been historically narrated or performed by tropes of shame and displays of pride. She further elaborates on the U.S. colonial discourse that supported “Americanization” when she asserts:

“Senator Albert J. Beveridge, for instance, justified the colonial project on the Island precisely in those terms, as an American mission to bring about the disappearance of debased civilizations and decaying races before the higher civilization of the nobler and more virile types of men” (p. 13).

It seems that by not showing resistance to the U.S. occupation of the Island in 1898, Puerto Ricans were perceived by the U.S. as “the queer working class black man who passively allowed the United States to violate the nation” (Negrón-Muntaner, 2004, p.15). Further elaborating on this perception of Puerto Ricans, she declares:

Not only were Puerto Ricans dismissed by the new metropolis as “unfit” for self-government since the “nation” was declared black (not Hispanic), a race (not a people), and effeminate (not virile), most boricuas actively participated in bringing about this new state of affairs and intimately—if contradictorily—invested in its reproduction...

As it is evidenced in the examples given above, the contradictory perceptions and actions of those who encounter colonial experience is closely related to structures, relations and discourses that perpetuate injustice, oppression and silence in their lives.

Yet the colonized always have the option of negotiating or contesting these conditions. These options become manifest in the identity, culture, language, and self-worth issues that arise from the experience. An example of this can becomes evident in P.R. where we can see how although Spanish colonization brought about political, social and economic injustice, those constraining conditions did not prevent Puerto Ricans from developing a national identity that developed through the incorporation of different aspects of the races, cultures, languages, and religions that came into contact as a result of the first colonial encounter. Furthermore, we can
also see how at the time of the Island’s transfer from one colonial power to another\textsuperscript{6}, this sense of \textit{Puertorriqueñidad}\textsuperscript{7} led to a valorization of the Spanish language as a vernacular language which became the strongest site of resistance to U.S. culture and language and remains so today. As Trias Monge (1997) further explains:

> Besides the love of song, dance and public speaking, there were many other binding forces in this society, otherwise so divided by levels of education and affluence and afflicted by misfortune.

> Language was of course, the most powerful component. Spanish enriched with Indian and African contributions as in the case of most other Spanish colonies in the New World, had extraordinary vitality. A great sense of pride in the language also helped establish bonds between Puerto Rico and the rest of the Spanish-speaking world, especially Latin America, whose brand of Spanish resembles Puerto Rico’s and does not differ much from the mother tongue. Such pride survives to this day, perhaps with greater force, as the Spanish language had to compete with English for a long time to assure its survival as the primary language of Puerto Rico (p. 19).

As we have seen, at the time of the U.S. invasion and subsequent transfer from one colonial power to another, Puerto Ricans had developed a strong sense of their culture and language which connected them to the rest of Latin America and other Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. For that reason, when U.S. colonial administrators attempted to impose English as the medium of instruction in Puerto Rican schools, the teaching of all subject areas \textit{in English} became problematic. It must be noted that it was not the teaching of English what was contested but rather the teaching of \textit{all} subjects \textit{in English}\textsuperscript{8}. Furthermore, constant changes in language laws and policies in schools led English and Spanish to come into direct competition for Puerto Rican affections as English became a symbolic marker of the U.S and Spanish became a symbolic marker of P.R. (Velez, 2000).

\textsuperscript{6} Spanish power to U.S. power.
\textsuperscript{7} The sense of feeling Puerto Rican, Morris (199?) translated this term to Puertorricanness.
\textsuperscript{8} For a more detailed account on this issue, please read…
To better understand the politics of English language teaching a discussion on ELT follows.

**The politics of ELT**

Languages are not just a mere systems of communication; languages is also an integral part of nations’ sense of collective identity as it is through the use of language that people construct their identities, come to understand and make sense of their world (Gee, 1996). As people share common social experiences, sharing a common language gives them a sense of belonging to the social group with whom they interact every day. That sense of belonging leads the users of that language to valorize it as their language becomes the voice and the heart of their people and their country (Salzmann, 1993).

As countries socialize their members into acquiring, using and valorizing their culture and their language—through caretakers, family and friends and then through formal schooling—people become acquainted with the power of language and the impact it has in their lives. Surely, this explains why one of the most common practices in colonial projects is the gaining control over language (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). Language is, thus the first feature of a people’s culture that is attacked once a colonial regime is established. As Crawford (2000) declares:

Language is the ultimate consensual institution. Displacing a community’s vernacular is equivalent to displacing its deepest systems of belief—not an easy task. Even when individuals consent to assimilation in other ways, it is excruciating to give up a native language. This is increasingly true as we grow older, because language is tied so closely to our sense of self: personality, ways of thinking, group identity, religious beliefs, and cultural rituals, formal and informal (p. 68).
Accordingly, the imposition of the vernacular language of the colonizer on the colonized is a violent attack on the culture of the colonized. Even when the colonized may resist this attack in their own way, such a violent assault has a detrimental effect on the psyche of the colonized since their cultures and languages are silenced and dismissed by the colonizer (Cesaire, 1955; Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1965). Consequently, some of the colonized conform to this situation and to the dominant discourses that emerge from the colonial encounter.

In the past, once the dominant situation was set in place, several institutions contributed to the displacement of the vernacular language of the colony. One of these institutions was school. An example of this practice can be seen in the African colonial experience where schools served as political sites where gender, class and racial inequities were produced and reproduced. As Macedo (2003) further explains:

In essence, the colonial educational structure seemed designed to inculcate the African natives with myths and beliefs that denied and belittled their lived experiences, history, culture, and language. Schools were seeing as purifying fountains where Africans could be saved from their deep-rooted ignorance, their “savage” culture, and their primitive language (p. 15).

What this citation shows is how schools served as the site where the colonial agenda became manifest. Furthermore, due to the clash of languages in the school setting, assumptions regarding the backwardness and/or ignorance of the “natives” who struggled to learn the language of the colonizer came to existence. As the previous example illustrates, during colonial times, a common assumption was that the colonial subordinates were inferior, backwards and weak (Said, 1978), and in the colonizer’s view, the colonial subjects deserved to be culturally and linguistically dominated. An example of this can be seen in P.R. since U.S. colonial initiatives sponsored attempts to anglicize Puerto Ricans through their educational system based on the assumption of English being the only means by which democratic values could be passed on to
Puerto Ricans (Crawford, 2000). This example illustrates how as the U.S. vision of Anglo-Saxon and English superiority grew on the Island, so did their mission of linguistic imperialism.

In the seminal book *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1991) examines the development of English as a world language. He defines English linguistic imperialism as the dominance of English being asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages (p. 47). In his analysis, Phillipson describes how ethnocentricity\(^9\) played an important role in this aspect of English language teaching. He argues that teachers and primary speakers\(^10\) of the language developed perceptions about the secondary speakers of the language based on assumptions about the culture of the learners. He adds that no matter how much sympathy or understanding the teachers had about the secondary culture, their assumptions would always influence the way they perceived language learners. According to Phillipson (1991), “there is a sense in which we are inescapably committed to the ethnocentricity of our own world view, however much insight and understanding we have of other cultures (p. 47). This statement suggests that it is difficult for language teachers to avoid judging language learners because their own world views will always affect the way these teachers perceive their learners, no matter how much they know about the culture or the sensibility that they have about their learners’ cultures.

Echoing the views of Phillipson (1992) regarding language teachers assumptions about their secondary English learners Pennycook (1998) declares:

The history of the ties between English Language Teaching (ELT) and colonialism has produced images of the Self and Other, understandings of English and of other languages and cultures that still play a major role in how English language teaching is constructed and practiced: from the native-non-native speaker dichotomy to the images constructed around English as a global language and the assumptions about learner’s cultures, much of ELT echoes with the cultural constructions of colonialism.” (p.19)

\(^9\) Refers to the practice of judging other cultures by the standards of one’s own.
\(^{10}\) Meaning those who speak the language as a first language.
These views of English as a colonizing tool are useful for the analysis of my experiences as a Puerto Rican English non-native teacher because they will contribute to my understanding of how colonial discourses might become manifest in my life and in my own educational practice.

According to Walsh (1991), the educational system in P.R. justified the colonial relationship with the U.S. through the use of discourses and materials that promoted U.S. cultural superiority over Puerto Rican cultural inferiority. As Walsh (1991) remarks:

From early childhood, students are taught that Puerto Rico is small and the United States is big, that Puerto Rico is poor and the United States rich, and that Puerto Rico is weak and the United States is strong. Outside of the United States, Puerto Rico has no history, no heroes or heroines; Puerto Rico has never been able to stand alone. This hegemonic positioning, according to some, has perpetuated sort of a national inferiority complex, a population that is torn between their own cultural roots and histories and those of the colonizer (p. 26).

Even when Walsh emphasizes how the U.S. colonial school system and its teachers promoted ideas of inferiority among Puerto Rican teachers and students, recent research informs differently.

Del Moral (2006) closely examined documentation of newspaper articles and teacher’s flyers produced during the first years of the implementation of the U.S. colonial educational system on the Island. Her research suggests that rather than assimilating to the U.S. colonial discourse being promoted by colonizers through the school system, local teachers engaged in the appropriation of the ideals, values and knowledge of their new colonizer to prepare Puerto Ricans not to assimilate but rather to help them become citizens capable of participation in nation-building processes. As Del Moral (2006) further explains:

The teachers’ flyers suggested that although the people of Puerto Rico did not yet meet the intellectual, physical and moral requirements of citizenship, with the help of public instruction, they could be transformed into healthy, moral, and intelligent community of citizens that would compose the future Puerto Rican nation. Teachers were going to help their students evolve from colonial subjects into national citizens, from illiterates to
intellectuals capable of comprehending and practicing their civic duties. Teachers and educators would reach into the island’s most distant and isolated, rural, and traditional communities and incorporate them into a modern, progressive, and democratic nation. The teachers’ flyer and the Mayaguez newspaper report both suggested that teachers and educators imagined an alternative nationalist project to the U.S. colonial educational policy of Americanization. This was one of the many examples found where local teachers promoted their own political vision for Puerto Rico, a vision not defined by Americanization (p. 4-5).

What Del Moral’s research suggests is that although colonial administrators believed that teachers would be their collaborators in the enforcing of the “Americanization” initiative, what Puerto Rican teachers seemed to be actually doing was promoting another project from within, one that would prepare Puerto Ricans for their future as citizens of an independent nation. This nation would become a model of democracy in the Caribbean (Urciolli, 1996) and its citizens would be fully bilingual. Nevertheless, as it happens in any context where the colonial language is seen as a threat to the local language, assumptions regarding the way in which that language must be taught and the discourses associated with them are ever present.

An example of this is given by Phillipson (1992), who asserted that the 1961 Commonwealth Conference on the teaching of English as a second language in Makerere, Uganda served as the place “where ELT was enshrined in a number of tenets” (p. 185) and as a result, ELT has been informed by assumptions and fallacies that still encourage many ELT practices around the world. One of these fallacies is the “native speaker fallacy” (p.183), the fallacy that perpetuates the assumption that “the ideal teacher is a native speaker” (p.193) which reinforces the idea that the native speaker is the only speaker capable of “owning” the language. The myth that native speakers could be better models for teaching English than non-native speakers with full mastering of the language in a moment when there are more English non-

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11 This conference brought 23 representatives from “countries who were assumed to have ELT needs” (p. 183).
native speakers seems illogical. Further commenting on the question of the ownership of English is Crystal (1997) who writes:

   English is the language most widely taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries, and English is now so widely established that it can no longer be thought of as owned by any single nation” (p. 15)

Echoing the views of Crystal is Widdowson (1994) who in his now famous plenary address at the 27th Annual TESOL Convention (1993) questions the ownership of English by the English native speaker and calls for more tolerance to diverse cultures, speakers and varieties of English from other contexts. As he further elaborates:

   The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language, is necessary to arrest its development and so undermine its international status…. As soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities, it follows logically that it must be diverse (p. 385).

Widdowson goes on to explore the reasons for the exclusion of those who are English non-native speakers from voicing their opinions within the field, because even when they speak the language, are not considered by English native speakers as owners of the language which for him is attached to the colonial past of English. This notion is evident by the following remarks:

   Of course English, of a kind is found everywhere as well, still spreading, a luxuriant growth from imperial seed. Seeded among other people but not ceded to them. At least not completely. For the English still cling tenaciously to their property and try to protect it from abuse (p.377).

Here, Widdowson reminds us that for those who feel they own the language, it is good to see it spread while it is not easy for them to give it away which might lead them to act as gatekeepers of the language by monitoring those who use the language and also the purposes for which it is used.
Even though Widdowson’s acknowledgment of the colonial legacy of English and his call for a more inclusive ELT practice is very important, the most important argument has to do with the advantages that the English non-native speaker/teacher has when compared to the English native speaker/teacher. As Widdowson further explains:

But what if you shift the emphasis away from contexts of use to contexts of learning, and consider how the language is to be specially designed to engage the student’s reality and activate the learning process? The special advantage of native-speaker teacher disappears. Now, on the contrary, it is the nonnative speaker-teachers who come into their own. For the context of learning, contrived within the classroom setting, has to be informed in some degree by the attitudes, beliefs, values and so on of the students’ cultural world. And in respect to this world, of course, it is the native –speaker teacher who is the outsider. To the extent that the design of instruction depends on familiarity with the student reality which English is to engage with, or on the particular sociocultural situations in which teaching and learning take place, then nonnative teachers have a clear and, indeed, decisive advantage (p. 387).

As we have seen, in a time when English spreads and is spoken all over the world, Widdowson’s argument regarding the ownership of English becomes a timely issue that should be in constant debate within the ELT field and beyond. Moreover, his notion that English non-native speaker/teachers are as capable as the English native speaker/teacher should be explored more thoroughly in order to empower English non-native speakers/teachers from the Outer Circle. Finally, as more teachers from these contexts explore and bring attention to the issue, perhaps more emphasis should be given to contribute to the creation and development of strategies and teaching practices that can help students become English speakers by encouraging their appropriation and use of the language for their own advantage.

Another perspective on this issue is discussed by McKay (2003) who argues that

“the teaching of English as an international language should be based on an entirely different set of assumptions that has typically informed English language teaching pedagogy” (p. 1). While stressing that the teaching of English as an international language (EIL) is influenced by assumptions from perspectives linked to the colonial legacy of ELT that focuses on cultural difference, McKay brings forth the notion that to
improve the way in which English is taught as an international language, the language must be “de-linked” from English native speaker culture (p. 19).

Just like Widdowson, she emphasizes on the need in ELT to foster “teaching methodologies that respect the local culture of learning” (p. 19). Further, she encourages a close examination of these different contexts by those who experience the challenges of teaching the language to ensure that local cultures and the methods used to teach English can be adapted to benefit the learners of each specific context. As she further explains:

An understanding of these cultures of learning should not be based on cultural stereotypes, in which assertions about the roles of the teachers and students and approaches to learning are made and often compared to Western culture. Rather, an understanding of local cultures of learning depends on an examination of particular classrooms. Although it is important to recognize that what happens in a specific classroom is influenced by political, social, and cultural factors of the larger community, each classroom is unique in the way the learners and teacher in that classroom interact with each one another in the learning of English. Given the diversity of local cultures of learning, it is unrealistic to imagine that one method, such as CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) will meet the needs of all learners. Rather, local teachers must be given the right and the responsibility to employ methods that are culturally sensitive and productive in their student’s learning of English (p. 19).

As we have seen in the examples above, there is a need to move ELT away from replicating colonial discourses and practices that perpetuate the inferiority of the English non-native speaker and toward a model that draws on their cultural knowledge and strengths to ensure a more balanced and fair English learning experience. Regarding the English non-native speakers/teachers, the fact that some are still being treated differently by students and colleagues in their own contexts based on the assumption that native speakers own the language and are better models of English teachers perpetuates an unequal treatment of English non-native speakers/teachers around the world. This is why the unequal treatment of English non-native speakers should be one of the main concerns of ELT teachers and researchers everywhere.

Another reason why this issue should be further explored is because of the disempowering effect that it has on the English non-native speaker/teacher. An example of this
is given by Tang (1997), who surveyed 47 English non-native speaker/teachers in Hong Kong on their perceptions of the proficiency and competency of both English and non-native speaker/teachers of English. An impressive 100% of the respondents actually believed English native speakers/teachers were superior to them. These results raise the question of the potentially negative impact of internalized ELT colonial discourse on the teaching practice of these individuals. Likewise, in another study, this time in Canada, similar questions were asked and turned out to have similar results. In this study, Amin (1997) interviewed five English non-native speakers/teachers who were teaching adult ESL to students from diverse backgrounds to explore the attitudes of minority students had to their English non-White/non-native speakers/teachers and whether these influenced the students’ investment in learning English. The study revealed that the teachers felt completely disempowered since their students seemed to have pre-conceived notions of who their teachers ought to be. For these teachers, they perceived that students preferred to have white, English native speakers as their teachers. Results also revealed that the non-white, non-native speakers who participated in the study developed negative perceptions of themselves, which in turn negatively impacted the confidence and teaching practice of these English non-native speakers/teachers.

Further commenting on the impact of colonial/hegemonic ELT discourse on the confidence of the English non-native speaker/teacher is Maum (2002), who considers that English non-native speakers/teachers face more challenges than their English native speaker colleagues since they must prove first that they are competent language speakers to both their students and their colleagues. She writes:

In the English teaching profession, native English speakers grapple primarily with establishing their identities as ESL teachers, while NNEST’s\textsuperscript{12} often have the added pressure of asserting themselves in the profession as competent English teachers (p. 3).

\textsuperscript{12} English Non-native speakers/teachers.
An important point that Maum brings forward is her belief that English non-native speakers/teachers have much more to offer the ELT field. For her, the English non-native speakers’/teacher’s experience as English language learners gives them a better understanding of the struggles that their students experience which contributes to a better informed English teaching practice. As Maum further elaborates:

Qualified and trained NNEST’s can contribute in meaningful ways to the field of English language education by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and their training and experience as teachers. Recent efforts, including research addressing the native speaker fallacy, the formation of NNEST caucus in TESOL, the development of innovative curricula in teacher training programs, and collaborative efforts between native and nonnative-English-speaking teachers are helping to give NNEST’s a voice in their profession and to recognize their position as equal partners in the field of English language teaching (p.4).

To Maum, as long as English non-native speakers/teachers are given the opportunity to have equal participation in discussions within the field they can contribute to more critical and effective English teaching practices, that allows them to contribute to the development of more inclusive English teaching education programs.

A complementary perspective on the advantages and possibilities that English non-native teachers have to offer to the larger English discourse is fully explored by Canagarajah (2003) whose work explores how appropriation and redefinitions of the English language by members of minority communities\(^\text{13}\) contribute to their empowerment as well as for the democratization of English. According to him, this alternative is beneficial for English as well as for teachers and learners of the language because it contributes to contesting the colonial discourses surrounding English and ELT. As Canagarajah (2003) further explains:

\(^{13}\) By minority communities, Canagarajah is referring to peoples from Outer Circle of English countries. In other words, those whose first language is not English.
While the center-based rules and values underlying English could alienate minority students, it is a more pluralized English that can accommodate their needs, desires, and values. English should become pluralized to accommodate the discourses of other cultures and facilitate fairer representations of periphery subjects. Periphery communities are therefore compelled by virtue of their marginalized status and location to reform English. Note also that through this process of appropriation the students are taking ideological resistance into the very heart of English. Rather than keeping competing discourses outside English, they are infusing them into the very structure of the language to reconfigure its ideological character (p.175).

What Canagarajah suggests is that when minority speakers of English appropriate English and infuse their local cultures and languages into the language, minority communities can contribute to the re-construing of English. Moreover, this presents learners with the opportunity of questioning not the reasons why they should learn English but rather on how they will do it. When minority teachers and learners engage in this type of questioning, their own knowledge about their cultures, conditions and uses of the language contribute to the transformation of English. Accordingly, this approach contests the notion that English should be viewed only as a colonial/hegemonic language. By viewing English as such, English then becomes a tool of liberation for minority speakers who as owners of the language are no longer excluded from the larger English discourse.

As it is evidenced above, these views of appropriation of the colonial language are fundamental for the decolonizing perspective to English teaching developed for this project because they present an alternative for English non-native teachers who wish to empower themselves by appropriating English to uncover, denounce and share the tensions present in the ELT field. Furthermore, by acknowledging these tensions English teachers can become more reflective in their English teaching practice. In my particular case, as I acknowledge my ownership of English, I become more reflective in my practice because I become aware of the struggles and needs that I share with my students. Moreover, this awareness helps me become
more sensitive to students’ issues, strengths and limitations that they bring into the classroom. This sensibility helps me develop teaching strategies that draw on my students’ strengths rather than on their weaknesses. By engaging in this type of teaching I am embracing the possibilities that a decolonizing perspective to English teaching can offer to my English language learners. Finally, a decolonizing perspective to English teaching gives me the opportunity to share my ideas and strategies with the larger English teaching community, and by doing so I am actively contributing to the transformation of English and my students.

In order to explore the possibilities that a more critical approach to English teaching can bring for both teachers and students, in the following section, I explore the notions of knowledge, resistance and critical pedagogy that are relevant for this study. This discussion is necessary in order to understand how Puerto Rican colonial experience has been sustained and contested.

**Knowledge construction, resistance, critical pedagogy and their impact on the educational process**

As members of a social group, we value some forms of knowledge more than others. Critical theorists (Freire, 1970; Foucault, 1980; McLaren, 1989; and Giroux, 2001, Brookfield, 2005) attribute this to knowledge being a social construct. Due to their considering knowledge to be “heavily dependent on culture, context, custom and historical specificity (McLaren, 1989, p. 174), critical theorists conclude that knowledge is symbolically created in the minds of people based on the type of experiences, interactions and schooling that individuals experience as members of society. Hence, the analytical perspective developed for this study draws on these understandings to define knowledge as the information, facts, skills, experiences, perceptions, values and assumptions that shape an individual as a member of a particular social group.
When applied to the field of education, such a perspective assumes that the experiences and interactions that students have in school lead them to understand how the world around them works (Freire, 1970; McLaren 1989). This is attributed to the fact that as children enter school, they spend most of their developing years surrounded by fellow students and teachers. Moreover, their experiences and interactions with teachers and fellow classmates contribute to their constructions of knowledge. Consequently, a notion from critical theory that is applicable to this research is the idea that those in positions of power create and legitimize the knowledge that sustains the larger power structure. Brookfield (2005) speaks more clearly about this when he writes:

Whoever is in a position of power is able to create knowledge supporting that power relationship. Whatever a society accepts as knowledge or truth inevitably ends up strengthening the power of some and limiting the power of others (p. 136).

Most often, those who are in positions of power are going to support the type of knowledge that helps maintain the power structure that sustains them. In the same way, any questioning of the status quo or of the historical and/or social conditions shared by the majority is constantly being monitored in order to avoid any threat to the powers that be. Accordingly, those few in control restrict the knowledge that the majority of the people are exposed to as their means to maintain the status quo of society. The schooling process can be used as the means to ensure that the status quo remains in place by leading the many to embrace and support the power structure that sustains the few as it reaches future citizens.

Well known critical educators such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren have examined how school settings serve the interests of dominant powers, and thus, perpetuate the status quo. They have also made very important contributions to the field of educational research, not only by exploring how schools serve as the place where knowledge is transmitted
but also by focusing on the fact that schools can also serve as cultural sites as well. For those of us who concur with those views on knowledge and schooling, it becomes extremely important to examine how schooling processes work to “marginalize, disconfirm, and delegitimize the experiences, histories, and categories that students use in mediating their lives” (Giroux, 1992, p. 17). The work of these theorists encourages teachers to start looking at the issues that emerge from the schooling process in order to lead teachers (such as myself) to start questioning their role in these processes.

If it were not for the conceptualization of knowledge as socially constructed and of schools as cultural sites, many educators would not have become interested in examining their teaching practice as the means not only to improve their practice, but also to start understanding and perceiving their students and the ways they interact with them in a different manner, as Giroux (1992) explains:

> We must understand that it is imperative for teachers to critically examine the cultural backgrounds and social formations out of which their students produce the categories they use to give meaning to the world. For teachers are not merely dealing with students who have individual interests, they are dealing primarily with individuals whose stories, memories, narratives, and readings of the world are inextricably related to wider social and cultural formations and categories. The issue here is not merely one of relevance but one of power. Schools produce not only subjects but also subjectivities and in doing so often function to disempower students by tracking them into classes with lowered expectation, or by refusing to provide them with knowledge that is relevant and speaks to the context of their everyday lives (p. 17).

Peter McLaren’s work deals specifically with the issue of how and why certain kinds of knowledge get constructed and legitimized. Regarding the usefulness of critical pedagogy theory when investigating this phenomenon, McLaren (1989) comments:

> “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not” (p. 174).
Critical pedagogy offers teachers an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the historical and social conditions that contribute to their constructions of knowledge, and by doing so, they will be better prepared to provide their students with the necessary tools that students need to deal with the circumstances and challenges that lie ahead in life.

According to McLaren (1989), critical pedagogy follows a distinction regarding forms of knowledge similar to that posited by German social theorist Jürgen Habermas. In McLaren’s book, Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy and the Foundations of Education, he elaborates on these forms of knowledge and applies them to the context of classroom teaching. These forms are: technical knowledge, practical knowledge and emancipatory knowledge. The one type of knowledge that connects knowledge to traditional constructions of knowledge and which is applicable to the colonial experience and thus, to the present research, is the notion of technical knowledge.

McLaren’s (1989) notion of technical knowledge consists of knowledge that can be measured and quantified. In his view, this is the type of knowledge that “mainstream educators use as they work primarily within liberal and conservative educational ideologies” (p. 174-175). These educational ideologies are based on the common shared assumptions that those who create the curricula share. Consequently, these assumptions are filtered down through the educational hierarchy and ultimately shape the type of knowledge that is taught in schools. To better illustrate this, let us apply the construction of technical knowledge to the educational colonial context of Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican Department of Education is the institution responsible for creating, implementing and regulating the educational policies that shape the educational system of the Island. Educational researchers and consultants make recommendations to the
Secretary of Education and those officials who work on creating the school curriculum\textsuperscript{14}. As a result of this, the Department of Education develops the standards and a curriculum that are consistent with the educational policy of the time\textsuperscript{15} and with Mainland national standards. These standards are supposed to measure the skills that students are expected to have acquired at the end of each academic year. Therefore, in order for the curriculum to be considered effective, school officials must ensure that the majority of the students successfully meet the standards of the curriculum throughout the course of the academic year. The task of assessing the amount of knowledge that students have gained is measured by examinations that are given at the end of each academic year. It must be noted that as a colony, Puerto Rico’s Department of Education is under the U.S. Department of Education’s jurisdiction, so therefore, additional testing associated with the No Child Left Behind initiative has also been implemented on the Island.

Thus, the responsibility of teaching the curriculum lies in the hands of teachers whose main responsibility is to cover the material during the school year. In order to do so, teachers plan and implement daily lessons that are part of those units that make up the curriculum. Evidently, teachers create, develop and implement their lesson plans based both on their knowledge of their subject matter and on the knowledge that they have acquired through their own teaching education process. Consequently, such a top-down approach to education is going to prevent teachers from having time to reflect on what they teach and how they teach because they are expected to evaluate whether or not their students have met the standards that measure the knowledge that students have gained. Hence, teaching becomes a mechanized process in which teachers load students with knowledge as they prepare them to pass an exam. For students,

\textsuperscript{14} In its broadest sense, the material taught in schools.

\textsuperscript{15} Historically, in P.R. educational policies have changed along with whoever is appointed Secretary of Education by the political party in control. For a more detailed historical account, see Algren 1987; Pousada, 1996, Uricioli, 1998; Torres-González, 2002).
it means that they receive this knowledge and memorize it in order to successfully pass their examinations.

A complementary view of this top-down view of knowledge construction is proposed by Freire (1970) through his concept of banking education. The banking model of education supports the notion that teachers are the all knowing keepers of knowledge who “bestow the gift of knowledge” to their students. Such a notion perpetuates the belief that the teacher or the knowledge they impart to their students is not supposed to be questioned. This is done based on the assumption that teachers know everything whereas students “know” nothing. In his description of how “the banking concept of education” works, Freire remarks:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the depositories and the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.

In this view of knowledge transmission, students are considered to be the passive receivers of knowledge whereas the teachers are considered to be the all knowing, all controlling givers of knowledge. Just like in McLaren’s technical knowledge construction idea, students become passive receivers of knowledge, which they will memorize and be able to recall when needed, as for example during an exam or a standardized examination. In addition, in such a top-down construction of knowledge, students contribute nothing to the process of education except for their desire to learn. The outcome of such a type of schooling process is that students are then conditioned to be told what to do and how to do it and this prevents them from questioning their own education. (Freire, 1970).

Usually, teachers are considered [only after parents] to be the members of society most crucial in transmitting knowledge to students. Accordingly, students look up to the teachers as the “beacons of light” that will guide them from darkness into light. Furthermore, students who
are accustomed to this type of knowledge construction expect teachers to show their expertise by knowing all the answers. In sum, this type of schooling supports uneven power relations between all of those involved in the schooling process.

Education is political. The abovementioned examples illustrate why several educational researchers (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989; Giroux, 1992, Shannon 1992; Diaz-Soto, 1998; Antrop-Gonzalez 2001; Brookfield, 2005) believe that education and the knowledge that it produces are in no way “innocent or value free” (Antrop-González, 2001, p. 16). Further commenting on the interests that education serves, Shaull (1992) writes:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom”, the means by which men and women critically and creatively struggle with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (p. 16).

As we have seen, several critical theorists concur with the notion that the process of schooling is not neutral and oftentimes serves as an instrument to lead students to integrate and conform to the status quo. However, they also believe that the schooling process can contribute to teachers’/students’ awareness of disadvantageous situations and circumstances that could inspire in them the desire to change them. When teachers discover the enabling and constraining effects of schooling, they not only become aware of social struggles that may have been overlooked by them, they also discover their potential for engaging in practices that benefit all of those involved in the process of schooling.

Thus, critical pedagogy presents an alternative for those teachers who are interested in questioning how the knowledge they have has been shaped and how it also shapes their daily relations and practices in the classroom. This field of study helps us gain a better understanding of what knowledge is and how it is constructed in specific contexts. Additionally, critical
pedagogy provides teachers with a better understanding of the social conditions of their students and also of oppressive schooling practices. By familiarizing themselves with critical pedagogy, teachers can become more reflective in their practice. As a result, they can better contribute to their students’ achievements of personal and academic goals. Critical pedagogy makes teachers more receptive to their students, and as result, teachers give themselves the opportunity for learning more about and from their students.

By developing a reflective stance, teachers are able to devote more of their time and energy not on perpetuating unproductive classroom dynamics, but rather on drawing on student’s strengths as they become more sensitive to their students’ needs and when necessary, they can contribute to the students’ overcoming of their detrimental circumstances. This is the type of schooling and teacher/student relations that every student should be entitled to. Similarly, students deserve to have a schooling process in which both teacher and student reflect, analyze and negotiate the knowledge that they receive. Accordingly, reflective teachers embrace the possibilities for them to make use of democratic practices that elude the oppressing or silencing of students.

Critical pedagogy also offers teachers the opportunity to reject the traditional technical/banking knowledge construction models. One way of doing this is by engaging in emancipatory knowledge (McLaren, 1989) construction practice. This means of knowledge construction challenges the above mentioned top-down approaches and explores the possibilities of fair and democratic models of schooling which will benefit all those involved in the process. As McLaren (1989) explains:

Emancipatory knowledge helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege. It also aims at creating the conditions under which irrationality, domination, and oppression can be overcome and transformed
through deliberative, collective action. In short, it creates the foundation for social justice, equality, and empowerment (p. 175).

By becoming aware of the possibilities that an emancipatory knowledge construction presents, both teachers and students benefit from the schooling experience. In emancipatory knowledge construction, it is expected that once teachers realize that schooling is not a neutral process, their sense of social justice will “kick in” and lead the teacher to engage in emancipatory knowledge construction practices that support the teachers becoming advocates of their students and vice versa. One of the dangers of teachers’ focusing on technical/banking knowledge construction models is that teachers play the role of oppressors as the uneven power relations promoted by these models transform classrooms into uncomfortable spaces instead of becoming “spaces for possibility” (Simon 1987).

According to Simon (1987), the idea of classrooms as “spaces for possibility” refers to classrooms becoming places where students feel comfortable questioning and negotiating the education they are being given. In other words, a space that promotes the developing of a questioning stance. As students develop a questioning stance they become agents of change within their own classrooms by learning about and practicing social justice as they resist being indoctrinated into believing all of what they are being taught, especially if they are being taught with materials that do not represent their realities, as in the case of minority students. Teachers who allow their classrooms to become “spaces for possibility” allow a place for continuous dialogic reasoning of conceptual and theoretical positions to take place instead of becoming oppressive places where students have no voice. Referring to an education for possibility, Simon (1991) declares:

An education that empowers for possibility must raise questions of how we can work for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom. What notions of knowing and what forms of learning will support this? I think that the project of
possibility requires an education rooted in a view of human freedom as the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity. This is the pedagogy we require, one whose standards and achievement objectives are determined in relation to goals of critique and the enhancement of social imagination. Teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside our immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is “not yet”—in order to alter the grounds upon which life is lived (p.144).

Moreover, when students develop a questioning stance, they begin to accept that no truth is absolute and that “everything is suspect” (Nealon & Giroux, 2003). In sum, by embracing emancipatory knowledge construction practice, both students and teachers discover that they are the most important component of the educational process. They also become aware that as such, they deserve to be presented with opportunities for making choices that will help them develop views of the world that are based on their constant questioning of their positioning in the world. For students it becomes central because sometimes the experiences and the materials that they encounter during their schooling process should support their learning how to read the world (Freire, 1970).

Therefore, Critical Pedagogy leads us to believe that teachers and students are the main components of the educational process and as such, have the right to become agents of change and not of perpetuation. This idea is central for both teachers and students who wish to develop a critical stance because it takes them to actively participate in the transformation of their world as they learn about the possibilities for social change and justice. By becoming aware of their conditions and their possibilities, both students and teachers both resist the colonizing makeup of schooling.

For this reason our discussion now moves towards an educational theory that explores how uneven power relationships nurture in the oppressed a desire for resistance. I am referring to Giroux’s theory of resistance in education. Henry Giroux is one of the most critical educational
theorists of our time. He has developed a notion of radical pedagogy that takes human agency very seriously. Throughout his work, Giroux examines schools as social sites. Consequently, his theory of radical pedagogy has developed from his understandings of resistance as a focal point for analyzing the relationship between school and society. According to Giroux (2001), the pedagogical value of resistance lies in the fact that it situates notions of structure, human agency, culture and self-formation in a new problematic for understanding the process of schooling. To him, resistance is central for a radical pedagogy because not only does it reject schools as simply “educational sites,” but it also enables students to find a voice that supports the maintenance and extension of their own cultures and histories. Moreover, through his engagement in the analysis of resistance, he concludes that in order to better understand what resistance is and how it comes to exist, the experiences of subordinate groups in school settings should be closely examined. As Giroux explains:

Clearly, in the behavior of subordinate groups there are moments of cultural and creative expression that are informed by a different logic, whether it be existential, religious, or otherwise. It is in these modes of behavior as well as in creative acts of resistance than the fleeting images of freedom are to be found. Finally, inherent in a radical notion of resistance is an expressed hope, an element of transcendence, for radical transformation—a notion that appears to be missing from a number of radical theories of education that appear trapped in the theoretical cemetery of Orwellian pessimism (p. 108).

Accordingly, Giroux’s ideas are useful for the present study as they focus on understanding how subordinate groups’ experiences can illuminate understandings about resistance, and the ways in which they exist even in the midst of uneven power relations.

When individuals are part of unbalanced power relations, there comes a point where they get tired of certain elements present in their everyday experiences which they are not willing to accept anymore. For this reason, in the case of subordinate groups, resistance grows from this
group’s hopes for change (Giroux, 2001). In other words, resistance emerges from their desire to change their current situation. This could explain why subordinate groups in schools would openly or subversively resist certain situations present in their everyday school life. Unfortunately, when resistance becomes evident in these educational contexts, students are oftentimes labeled as problematic because it is assumed that there is something wrong with them. Usually these assumptions are based on prejudice, racism and common stereotypes that emphasize the subordinate’s group physical, cultural or socio-economic differences. The problem here is not the subordinate students, but the perpetuation of these assumptions which eventually further distance these students from the majority of the students in the school. Teachers need to recognize acts of resistance as students’ attempt to get across the extent of their struggle against any form of social domination. In other words, instead of just assuming that there is something [psychically, culturally or mentally] wrong with the student/s, teachers should learn to read these semiconscious and conscious messages from students. As Giroux (2001) further elaborates:

Resistance in this case, redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with the logic of deviance, individual pathology, learned helplessness (and, of course genetic explanations), and a great deal to do, though not exhaustively, with the logic of moral and political indignation (p. 107).

It must be noted that this application of Giroux’s analysis of resistance is not limited to subordinate students. Resistance is present wherever there is an oppressive situation. Therefore, resistance can also be manifested in teachers’ actions as they develop the lessons that shape the knowledge that gets constructed in classrooms. Teachers have the power to reject knowledge construction models and practices that overlook subordinate groups and their struggles for social justice. As Giroux further elaborates:
What is needed is a theoretical model in which schools are viewed and evaluated, both in historical and contemporary terms, as social sites in which human actors are both constrained and mobilized. In other words, schooling must be analyzed as a societal process, one in which different social groups both accept and reject the complex mediations of culture, knowledge, and power that give form and meaning to the process of schooling (p. 62).

In sum, Giroux’s theory of resistance (2001) supports the idea that wherever there is oppression, there is always the possibility for resistance, and that resistance is rooted in the desire or hope for change. In this view, the oppressed are not “simply considered passive or submissive in the face of domination” (p. 108), they always have power and as conduits of power they have the power to change the status quo.

In order to understand how power can be negotiated by members of colonized and marginalized communities, a discussion on power follows.

**Power as something that is negotiated rather than possessed**

In this research study, I draw on Michel Foucault’s (1976) notion of power as circulating and productive force because it provides an understanding of power that allows the possibility for negotiations even within the most oppressive interactions. Even when we cannot deny that power can oppress and repress people, especially in colonized environments, power is much more than an all controlling force that dominates people. Foucault’s (1976) definition of power is helpful in the sense that it presents power as “something” that flows and that is used rather than possessed. Such a notion allows for one to reject top-down understandings of power which tend to overlook the potential for redefinitions, appropriations and or subversive contestations by individuals or groups of people.
Most of our understandings of power as circulating and productive are a result of the extensive work of Foucault. In his essay “The Subject and Power” (1982), Foucault explains that the reason why he invested so much time in studying power was because he needed to expand on existing notions of power in order to be able to study the subject. In his view, power must be analyzed as:

something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application (Foucault, 1976, p. 98).

Foucault’s definition of power has added a new dimension to understandings of power as it established power also as an all-pervading force. Brookfield (2005) best captures the very essence of Foucault’s notion of power when he states:

A central point in Foucault’s analysis is that power is omnipresent, etched into the minutiae of our daily lives and exercised continually by those that critical theory usually describes as “the masses”. This is in marked contrast to a view which sees power as possessed chiefly by a dominant elite, exercised from above and emanating from a central location that is clearly identifiable (p. 125).

According to Foucault (1982), since power is always present and it circulates, it cannot be simply classified as just something good or bad. Moreover, he adds, that it is possible for an individual to experience the constricting and enabling aspects of power at the same time. Further commenting on this aspect of Foucault’s notion of power, Brookfield (2005) writes:

The simple classification of power as either good or evil is, for Foucault, hopelessly wrong. Power is far more complex, capable of being experienced as repressive and liberatory in the same situation (p.120).

He [Foucault] sees this as possible because his view of power is one that takes power away from a central dominating entity and expands it through individual channels of power. For this reason,
more educational research should apply Foucault’s theory of power to analyze the experiences of subordinate or oppressed groups in order to identify moments when these individuals might be experiencing both aspects of power. Research projects that closely examine this conceptualization of power can definitively further researchers’ understandings of the relationship of power and resistance.

Hence, if one uses Foucault’s views of power for understanding the experiences of oppressed people, as we work our way across the analysis [instead of top-down], we are able to see how the oppressive situation fosters in a person the desire to get the best out of their situation by appropriating and reclaiming [for example the language of the colonizer], resisting and fighting oppression in the way that seems more feasible to them at particular moments. An example of this can be seen in the way school settings exert power over the student population by enforcing curriculums that do not reflect the reality of some of the students. Even when students are being oppressed, this does not make the students powerless against it. Students know that they might not be able to change the curriculum overnight, nevertheless, that does not prevent them from resisting the curriculum that they are being taught. Further commenting on resistance is Brookfield (2005) who adds:

The fact that overthrowing the state, reversing the history of patriarchy, or ending racism are not the only options for those resisting power opens up the possibility of smaller acts of opposition (p. 140)

Generally speaking, this notion of power allows for an analysis that illustrates why students would engage in behaviors that, as problematic as they may seem, are signs of the struggles that they might be experiencing inside and outside school settings (Giroux, 2001).

As I have shown, this conceptualization of power makes room for the possibility of negotiation and appropriation. In my particular case, it helps to better understand how even
when I seemed to consent to particular views of English, the U.S./P.R. colonial relationship and of women’s roles, there were always negotiations, redefinitions, and appropriations taking place.

In order to fully explore how these negotiations, redefinitions and appropriations are constantly taking place, our discussion now moves to a discussion on hegemony.

**Hegemony**

Hegemony is commonly associated with the work of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian political economist who investigated how and why the ruling class was so successful in promoting their interests in society (Brookfield, 2005). In this research, I use hegemony as the manner in which people learn to live and embrace the beliefs that surround them and are central to their lives even when these beliefs work against them. For this study, I will draw on Brookfield’s analysis of Gramsci’s work, as it provides me with a framework that connects power with hegemony. A more precise definition of hegemony is given by Brookfield (2005), who states:

Hegemony is the process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us (p. 93).

This definition supports the notion that hegemony works only when there is consent (Brookfield, 2005). In other words, for hegemony to really work, individuals share the idea that the interests of the few are the interests of all. People not only embrace these beliefs, but justify them and even defend these beliefs against any attack. The idea is to maintain the “normality of life”, the order in which things should occur.

Another definition of hegemony that supports the notion of domination by consent is given by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2005) who assert:
Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media by which the ruling class’s interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted (p. 116).

In other words, hegemony is at play when people act as their own jailers. Consequently, those in power do not have to worry about maintaining control by force over the masses since these same masses will sustain the very structure that oppresses them.

That said, the concept of hegemony is useful in this research because it provides an understanding of how hegemony works as people conform to oppressive relations, but also provides us with the essentials to better understand how people engage in counter hegemony. Even when Brookfield (2005) best summarizes the outcome of hegemony when he states that “through hegemony we learn to love our servitude” (p. 93), he also shows us that not all is lost in this process. Even when people are led to believe that the power structure must remain as it is, when people become aware of how hegemony and hegemonic discourses work, this new knowledge increases the likelihood for people to decide to change their condition. This is what is known as counter hegemony. As Brookfield (2005) remarks:

Hegemony is flexible, malleable, able to adjust and reconfigure its shape to try and block whatever revolutionary impulse emerges to challenge it. However, all is not doom and gloom from the tomb. The hegemonic blanket is never broad or deep enough to cover all parts of the body politic at all moments. Hegemony is always being contested, to a greater or lesser extent, by elements of those it seeks to dominate. So the hegemonic process is really a constant process of realignment as challenges arise to the dominant’s group’s control and as this group works to dampen these (p. 102-103).

Brookfield suggests is that even when it is hard to imagine people contesting hegemony, it can be done. Hegemony is not something static, but something that is in constantly in dialogical evolution. Therefore, counter hegemony gives hope to those of us who wish to contest colonial/hegemonic structures and or discourses.
To engage in counter-hegemony requires individuals to assert their own opinions and unique energy into the dialogue of discourse communities. It also entails a redefinition and re-reading of the history of the world from the standpoint of individuals or groups of peoples whose histories and perspectives have been silenced by colonial and hegemonic discourse. In the case of researchers, the most appropriate way to do this is by engaging in research practices that uncovers the colonizing nature of structures and discourses. This process must emerge from the desire to contest colonial and hegemonic discourses in all of its manifestations. Furthermore, for teachers, this means that as those who are responsible for shaping the knowledge of future citizens, we should help students “identify the specific individuals, groups, and organizations that are the perpetrators of injustice” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 113). In other words, provide students with the opportunity to learn what and who makes us “love our servitude” to the status quo which can help lead them to ways and practices in which they can contest those ideas.

In order to consider ways in which Latinas like myself have contested hegemony, our discussion now turns to a very important concept from Latino Studies that I am drawing on for this project: the concept of mestiza consciousness.

**Mestiza Consciousness**

Anzaldúa’s ideas on mestiza consciousness are foundational for the decolonizing perspective developed for this project. To date, Gloria Anzaldúa’s work provides the most articulated conceptualization of Latina hybridity which is extremely helpful as a starting point for understanding the complexity of mestiza experience. According to Anzaldua, the mestiza is a new entity, one that has emerged from the mixture of races and colonial experience. As Anzaldúa (1987) further explains:
la mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed…

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision (p. 100).

Anzaldúa thus offers us a starting point for thinking about Latinas colonial experience and ways in which we struggle and/or contest the legacy of our colonial experience. Regardless of our positions and locations, mestizas constantly struggle with the legacy of colonialism and oppression that we have inherited from our families, religion, cultures and the Spanish language. Accordingly, gaining a better understanding of the mestiza experience in the U.S. gives me an appreciation of the ways in which Puerto Rican culture differs from mainstream estadounidense\(^\text{17}\) culture.

The acknowledgement of these differences leads me to a personal, intellectual, and painful transformation through which I learn to question everything that I have been taught and exposed to as a Puerto Rican woman in order to move towards more inclusive models that value the knowledge that my constructions of gender, culture and ways of knowing have given me. According to Anzaldúa, this is what we should value when we choose to follow el camino de la mestiza\(^\text{18}\) as we construct a theory that emerge from our own lived experience. According to Anzaldúa, mestizas have the option of identifying what is inherited, what is acquired and what has been imposed on us, in order to break away from this oppressive way of thinking and move towards more open and inclusive ways of thinking and being. As a result, mestizas develop a

\(^{17}\) United States white, English speakers.
\(^{18}\) The mestiza’s way
tolerance for ambiguity and hybridity as we navigate between races, languages and cultures.

Further elaborating on *el camino de la mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes:

This step is a conscious rapture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets story, and using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nahual*\(^{19}\), able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small “I” into the total Self. *Se hace moldeadora de su alma. Según la concepción que tiene de si misma así será* (p. 104-105).

An example of researchers who have followed *el camino de la mestiza* are The Latina Feminist Group, a group of Latina scholars whose work created a space where they can explore their own experiences and develop their own theory through the use of *testimonio*. These Latina writers have modeled the process of theorizing individual and collective stories through autobiographical writing and through the use of English, Spanish and Spanglish. As they further explain:

Our process in describing our process of coming together and collaborating over seven years is to illustrate how we came to theorize feminist *latinidades* through *testimonio*. While our writings might stand on their own, our collaborative process, which used the method of *testimonio*, ultimately was framed by common political views about how to create knowledge and theory through our experiences (p. 8).

Through theorizing their experiences, these women have opened the door to other Latinas to start opening up and sharing their own individual and collective stories in their quest for achieve equality, and respect from mainstream cultures.

A corresponding view of applying the Mestiza Way as defined by Anzaldúa within the field of education is proposed by Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez and Villenas (2006), a group of educators interested in the ways in which Chicana/Latina perspectives inform education.

\(^{19}\) A human being who has the power to magically turn herself into an animal form, and then use her powers for good or for evil causes according to her personality.
Through their work, they manage not only to build bridges to bring together Latina theories to discussions about education, but also manage to valorize everyday experiences and practices of teaching, learning, and communal “knowing” as education as well. Their work is central to this project since it establishes the grounds for a better understanding of the Latina experience in education as one based on colonialism and oppression but also as one contested by resistance and hope. Their work is also useful to a decolonizing perspective to English teaching because it connects our understandings of knowledge, power and hegemony with critical pedagogies that can help Latinas overcome the legacy of colonialism and oppression that we experience in the educational process and in our everyday lives. Further commenting on the advantages of embracing the Mestiza Way in education are Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez and Villenas (2006) who explain:

If teachers and administrators learn to value mother’s life experiences, their will to sobrevivir and orientation to knowledge (la facultad) that is transmitted to children as consejos, historias (stories), and testimonies as well as through the physical body, then the very notion of parental involvement may also be transformed. That is, if we center both Latina womanist-oriented knowledge about the world and a pedagogy of convivencia (a praxis of relating and living together), we can create school and home partnerships that truly respect and work from the power of relationships, commitment, wisdom, and sensibilities born of a life’s work of straddling fragmented realities (p. 5).

As it is evidenced in the examples above, a better understanding of mestiza consciousness helps us Latina researchers develop decolonizing perspectives that allows us to move away from the colonial and oppressive experience towards an experience of emancipation. As a Puerto Rican English teacher, this is exactly what I want to accomplish through a decolonizing perspective to English teaching.
**Closing remarks**

As I have shown in this chapter, the theories presented here provide me with a theoretical base with which I will make sense of the experiences that I describe and analyze in this research project. By weaving these theories into a decolonizing perspective to English teaching, I am hoping to contribute to the advancement of a liberatory methodology and pedagogy that will foster changes in the way students from colonized and marginalized communities are taught English in my country and other parts of the world. English teachers should become aware that English teaching entails much more than just “giving” English language knowledge to students. English teaching also involves engaging in a dialogical teaching practice that supports students’ participation in knowledge construction practices that allow them not only to learn English, but that also allow them to appropriate the language and become critical thinkers and active participants in their own education and liberation processes. My ultimate hope is that this research contributes to initiate this dialogue and assists us to become agents of change and not of perpetuation of colonial and oppressive English teaching practices.
CHAPTER THREE:

A DECOLONIZING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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hope to guide you with love on your courageous journey of self discovery an awakening of your body and soul to inspire you to value the knowledge of your people. Take a leap to the unknown so you can listen to your self, nurture your soul, overcome your challenges AND help us heal the colonial wound together.

woman    mother    memory
student   daughter   sister
experiences  writing

teacher    dreams    “Other”  lies

uncertainty  Latina  vulnerability  political
Boricua   educator    personal
reflective    ambiguity    ways of knowing

NanVan, 2008
Why choose a decolonizing methodology?

The methodology that I have chosen to privilege in this research project can be defined as a decolonizing methodology which draws on auto-ethnography, auto-biography, narrative writing and testimonio. The decision of developing such a methodology comes as a result of my being a member of historically colonized communities. As such, I have witnessed first hand the complexities of being socialized, formally schooled and trained as an English teacher within colonial P.R. For this reason, drawing on Latina feminist methodologies is helpful not only for attaching meaning to personal and professional experiences, but it also serves as a way to empower individuals who have experienced oppression in many aspects of their lives. Moreover, a methodology that springs from my lived experience allows me to explore and analyze emergent themes from this self-study. Since colonization promotes a set of very specific ideas, there might be common themes among my stories and the stories of those researchers and teachers who are also interested in understanding the ways in which indigenous and colonized peoples construct and contest their knowledge.

I am a Puerto Rican woman. As such, I acknowledge that my personal life informs and shapes who the type of academic that I am (Ladson-Billings, 1997) and the type of research that I choose to do. As someone who has been socialized within the colonized context of P.R., I have decided to take on Memmi’s (1965) challenge of attempting to reduce the pernicious effects of colonization by seeking and questioning the colonized self in order to better understand the impact of colonial experience in both my personal and professional life. Therefore, as a researcher from a colonized and marginalized community, it is central for me to take on research methods that are consistent with my positioning and participation in the world (Brettell, 1997).
Thus, in this project, I theorize my lived experience. This process is guided by the works of researchers who made their lives a “source of inquiry” (Anzaldua 1987; Negrón-Muntaner, 1994; Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; Richardson, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Alvarez, 2001; and Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006) in order for the reader to hear my inner voice as I reflect about the cultural and educational world that has shaped me (Ladson-Billings, 1997). By doing this, I aim decolonize my mind as I uncover issues that are relevant to members of my colonized and marginalized communities.

The main reason I chose to engage in a decolonizing project emerged from the book, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People by Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), who argues that scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism, and still remains “a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples” (p. 1). Reflecting on the ways in which research has been disrespectful of the positions, ways of thinking and emotions of indigenous researchers and researched, Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) adds:

It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who create and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples’ claims to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments (p.1).

The preceding citation conveys her concern about the ways in which researchers go into colonized and marginalized contexts to intervene, scrutinize, steal and appropriate knowledge from these communities to later on make generalizations based on Western assumptions about other cultures and forms of knowing (Said, 1978) that researchers are trained to support.
Throughout her book, Tuhiwai-Smith encourages researchers from indigenous contexts to engage in research methodologies and analytical perspectives that contribute to decolonizing research. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) further explains:

decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.

For her, since research practices are informed by personal assumptions, motivations and values, researchers must critically examine the extent to which these might be related or informed by colonial discourse or practices. Accordingly, Tuhiwai-Smith’s work motivates us [indigenous peoples] to engage in methods that become the “means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed through a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices (p. 143). Consequently, as a colonized person, a research project that stems from personal experience supports the “healing, restoration, and social justice” that I yearn for right now as a result of my new understandings of research and the world.

Echoing the views of Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) regarding the use of personal experience as the foundation from where to develop decolonizing methodologies and perspectives, the Latina Feminist Group (2001) remarks:

We all professed in the classroom about the connection between life experience and new knowledge construction, but we had never made out our own life a source of inquiry (p. 2).

One characteristic that is worth noting about the research that I will be conducting is that it will draw on a variety of feminist decolonizing methodologies, such as testimonio20, which stress the importance of personal experience when theorizing about the social conditions of individuals who are part of marginalized communities.

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20 Stories about lives that could take the form of auto-biographical narratives, short stories, poems and dialogues (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 1).
Brookfield (2004) remarks that theorizing allows researchers to accomplish three goals: how to make sense of the world, how to communicate that understanding to others, and how to enable us to take informed action. Therefore, research that allows for the theorizing personal experience like testimonio is a way of decolonizing the mind. Further elaborating on the use of testimonio as their means to theorize experience and decolonize their research practice, the Latina Feminist Group (2001) asserts:

*Testimonio* has been critical in movements for liberation in Latin America, offering an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community. Similarly, many Latinas participated in the important political praxis of feminist consciousness-raising. The “second wave” feminist movement honored women’s stories and showed how personal experience contains larger political meaning (p. 3).

This feminist methodology is helpful to this research is because it incorporates valuable sources of knowledge that helps us [colonized] gain better understandings of the conditions that have shaped our lives. According to Weedon (1999), since women are traditionally oppressed and marginalized individuals within society and academia, we share a “sensitivity to power that comes from being subordinate” (p. 59). In addition, as a woman, researcher and educator of color, I find these methodologies fit for this project since it complements my views on the importance of personal experience to illustrate how the personal becomes political. As Weedon (1999) further explains:

A central tenet of radical feminist thought is that existing theory and scholarship, like the academy more generally, is both male-defined and patriarchal. It is male-defined in its norms, values and objects of study which exclude women’s history, experience and interests. It is patriarchal in the meanings and values which it both produces and reproduces. As such it cannot serve as a source of useful knowledge for women. To develop useful and affirming knowledge, women need to start from their own experience, both their personal lives and politics (p. 37).

Therefore, the creating and developing of decolonizing methods and perspectives that highlight personal experience as central in the process of gaining new knowledge, offers me an alternative
methodology and lens with which to examine my experiences as a Puerto Rican English educator within the colonial context of P.R.

I hope this project serves as a decolonizing project that can inspire researchers and teachers from colonized and marginalized communities to work towards just social conditions and education for their people. In my case, this project allows me to join forces with my community in our struggle for emancipation. Trask (1996) illustrates the importance of women’s involvement in this quest when she declares:

Sovereignty for our people is a larger goal than legal or educational or political equity with our men. As we struggle for sovereignty, our women come to the fore anyway. We Hawaiian women are made of strong stock; our presence on the front line of resistance proves this. But we also share many more similarities, both in struggle and in controversy, with our men and with each other as indigenous women than we do with white people. The familiar point here is that culture is a larger reality than women’s “rights” (p. 914).

Further commenting on the importance of women’s involvement in working towards the emancipation of marginalized communities, Trask (1996) adds:

More than a feminist, I am a nationalist, trained by my family and destined by my genealogy to speak and work on my people’s behalf, including our women. I am a leader, and my obligation is to lead, both our women and our men. This is my duty to our people—all of them: the ancestors, the living, the yet to be born. I am comfortable with that (p.915).

As the example above illustrate, women researchers can contribute to the emancipation of their communities by developing methodologies that are value laden, emphasize the centrality of the meaning of experience, and encourage researchers to become involved in the struggles of the researched (Weiler, 1988).

These principles make clear why researchers and educators of color and from indigenous and colonial backgrounds are attracted to privilege decolonizing methodologies in their research practice. This type of research enables us to closely examine uneven power relations and how
these play out in their natural, everyday settings. When research focuses on everyday experience, researchers are able to observe the ways in which people position, negotiate and resist particular roles and/or conditions in life [including our own]. As Mitchell, Weber and O’Reilly (2005) affirm:

It is in our everyday language that we are most likely to lay bare our taken-for-granted assumptions, casually or unthinkingly revealing deep differences in the stances and values of our research, and perhaps of ourselves (p. 5).

Furthermore, this type of research can lead to an awareness of resistance strategies that both researcher and research who might experience unjust social conditions might engage in, and which might be overlooked by traditional research data elicitation instruments.

Finally, as researcher and an educator, I hope that through a decolonizing methodology I not only gain a better understanding of the world but that I can also contribute to change it. This type of research promotes the idea that researchers and teachers become politically active in the struggles of the community that they are researching or are part of. Researchers should examine their positions in the particular places where they conduct research in order to explore how they might be participating in their own colonization and marginalization, and that of the group that they might feel culturally or collectively connected to (Villenas, 1996). By doing so, they develop an interest in joining the community in its struggles for emancipation and/or social justice.

My ultimate goal is to contribute to the advancement of a liberatory problem-posing education that will foster changes in the way students are schooled in my country. Puerto Rican English teachers should become aware that English teaching entails much more than just “giving” English language knowledge to students, that it also involves engaging in a dialogical teaching practice that supports our participation in knowledge construction practices that allow
our students not only to learn English, but that also allows them to become free thinkers. My ultimate hope is that this research helps to initiate this dialogue and assists us all to become agents of change and not of perpetuation.

In what follows I further explore the decolonizing methodology that I have chosen to privilege in this research. This methodology draws on qualitative research methods and combines them with ways of writing that employ narrative and autobiographical writing which relies on vulnerability, memory and sharing to illustrate how this methodology is the most appropriate for this researcher to explore her personal journey into colonial experience.

**Qualitative Research**

Educational researchers and teachers are finding that one of the advantages of privileging the qualitative research tradition when working with colonized and marginalized communities is that this type of research focuses on viewing the world or reality as socially constructed by these individuals through their interactions in the world (Merriam, 2002). Up until recently I had a closed, fixed and different view of the world. After learning more about qualitative research, post-colonial and critical pedagogy theories, I am now developing a new understanding of the world. This new understanding leads me to believe that we are historically and socially constructed. Therefore, this is one of the reasons why I have decided to privilege a research methodology that takes my experiences as a colonized and marginalized individual into account in order to explore how history, culture, language and institutions have shaped the kind of individual, teacher/researcher that I am.

According to Merriam (1991), research “is a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (p. 43). As a researcher who enters
the realm of qualitative research for the first time in her life, this research project contributes to my learning more about the type of educator/researcher I am and the type of educator/researcher that I want to be. Through this qualitative research project I move from “the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 5), in order to create “spaces for possibility” for those who [like me] seek to decolonize research and our minds.

After learning how each research tradition defines and makes sense of the world, I have dramatically shifted towards the qualitative research tradition. Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Connelly (2000) is:

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings. Attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

Qualitative research allows researchers to closely examine the meanings and perceptions that shape people’s actions and reactions. For those of us who choose to work within this research tradition, the questions we ask as researchers and the methods we use to answer these questions are products of our own worldviews which are based on the social constructions that we have made through our interactions with the world (Merriam, 1991; Merriam, 2002).

Traditionally, research has silenced and erased the voices of researchers and researched from historically colonized and marginalized communities (Trask, 1996; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Kaomea, 2003). Consequently, by choosing to do a qualitative research project, I gave myself the opportunity to share, describe, challenge and critique rather than measure, quantify or

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perpetuate existing assumptions regarding my colonized and marginalized communities. Among the research methods I could have chosen from to conduct this study, I found qualitative methods to be most effective for interrogating my own consciousness, language and ways of knowing in order to come to see the realities of my own relationships (Weiler, 1988). Hence, qualitative methods facilitated an analysis of the social environment and communities that have shaped my thinking. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) remark:

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (p. 8)

The qualitative research tradition supports the notion that a researcher can turn the researcher’s gaze towards her/himself to expand their understandings of how assumptions that underlie their thinking will always influence what and how they choose, investigate and analyze the contexts and the communities that they research.

For that reason, through the practice of the qualitative method known as auto-ethnography, I interrogate my own consciousness with the hope of actively building and contributing to an understanding of the diverse and multiple expressions of self-reflection which the mind is capable of producing. Furthermore, I also illustrate how the creation, analysis and interpretation of these multiple expressions could be a meaningful resource for researching, teaching and learning in classrooms and beyond. Educators and researchers from colonized and marginalized groups need to consider alternatives to appropriate, challenge and expand on traditional conceptions of research via the integration of strategies that allow researchers from colonized and marginalized communities to understand the knowledge that their own experience has given them (Dewey, 1938).
Through the use of this method, I am challenging traditional quantitative methods that I have been trained to use in the past. Scholars who challenged traditional methods by making their personal and professional experiences their source of inquiry (e.g. Anzaldua 1987; Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; Richardson, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Narayan, 1997; and Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez and Villenas, 2006), contest the view that research should be “emotionless and value-free”. Furthermore, through narrative writing, these researchers demonstrate their desire to retreat from the stance of dispassion all too prevailing in academia in order to engage themselves in the theorizing of conditions of social injustice (Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong, 2000).

**Auto-biographical Writing: relying on vulnerability, memory, and sharing**

Narrative writing is extremely useful for those who seek to theorize conditions of social injustice since both researcher and researched connect through the individual and collective stories being shared which eventually move them to social action. Laurel Richardson (1997) points out that some of the rewards of using narrative writing include giving voice to the marginalized and silenced, as well as contributing to connecting researcher and researched as a common group. Further elaborating on the advantages of narrative writing, Richardson (1997) asserts:

> By emotionally biding people together who have had the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness. Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, and therewith, the possibility of societal transformation (p. 33)

Hence, narrative writing opens the possibilities for those of us interested in social change. This type of writing helps us make sense of our lives [researchers] and contributes to gaining a better
understanding of the lives of others which ultimately facilitates the process of identifying issues that affect these communities. Once identified, researcher and researched can join forces as they attempt to find solutions to the issues that impact these individuals. When Richardson’s ideas on narrative writing are applied to this research project, I can clearly see how this type of writing offers hope to my historically silenced and marginalized communities. Her ideas encourage me to embrace narrative writing as not only a tool of inquiry, but also as a way to empower myself and my people. Accordingly, narrative writing becomes a powerful tool for this researcher to connect to my communities as I join them in our struggle for decolonization and emancipation.

Nonetheless, this is a very difficult undertaking. As I crossed the threshold into these means of inquiry, I found myself making a common mistake that novice vulnerable researchers do, which is to misunderstand the use of the personal voice when engaging in vulnerable writing. In the beginning, I believed that vulnerable writing was limited to using the first person point of view to share personal information with the reader. Behar (1996) explains that the ability of writing vulnerably is one difficult to master because using the personal voice does not mean that “anything personal goes” (Behar, 1996, p. 14). In her book *The Vulnerable Observer*, Behar explores the challenges and rewards of vulnerable writing and recommends writers refrain from giving away too much information and rather focus on identifying which aspects of the self are the most important filters through which we perceive the world. According to her, the strength of vulnerable writing lies in making connections between those particular experiences and the topic of study. This notion is evidenced by the following remarks:

That *making connections between personal experience and the subject under study, my emphasis* doesn’t require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one

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22 This term refers to the researcher who reports her/his research in a way in which the researcher discloses personal information and experiences in order to learn more about her/himself while reporting what s/he has learned about others.
perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied. Efforts at self-revelation flop, not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and observed (pp. 13-14).

As Behar’s citation suggests, it seems that the time I first engaged in vulnerable writing, I completely overlooked that the real usefulness of vulnerable writing lies not in the personal information being shared, but rather in the researcher’s/writer’s ability to make the connection between the particular experience and the broader social context while presenting it in an appealing manner to the reader. Only when the researcher/writer is able to connect personal experience and the social context does vulnerable writing work. Furthermore, the researcher also needs to find a way to make that connection interesting to the reader in order to avoid producing a boring text since in Behar’s opinion, a boring self-revelation is far more humiliating that any detail of personal information revealed by the writer. As Behar explains:

It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate oneself in one’s own text. Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. I would say it takes yet greater skill. The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self-revelation, one that fails to move the reader, it is more embarrassing; it is humiliating (p. 13).

So in order to become a better vulnerable writer, I first need to embrace the notion that a key element to avoid writing a weak piece of vulnerable writing lies in my willingness to explore the diverse and multiple expressions of self-reflection that my mind is capable of producing about a particular event which led me to focus on fully examining the intellectual and emotional connections of what I reveal with my topic of study.

Nevertheless, a vulnerable voice is guaranteed to cause discomfort among those who disapprove of the use of the personal voice in academia. For that reason, when vulnerable researchers do not make their connections clear, critics of the approach attribute this failure to
the use of the personal voice. Yet, Behar reminds me that it not the use of the personal voice but the misuse of it that makes these efforts fail. As Behar further expands:

Efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and observed (pp. 13-14).

As this citation suggests, when I choose to write vulnerably, I must be willing to face the scrutiny of those who do not approve of the use of personal voice. For that reason, I must be willing to fully explore the extent of those connections that are revealed so I can lead my readers to identify or question their own assumptions about how the world around us works.

Another step towards successful vulnerable writing is to find creative and appealing ways so readers can relate to our connections between personal experience and our topic of study. This is essential for the writer who wants to push readers not only to relate to the stories, but also to share their own untold stories as well. One of the most important goals of sharing personal information pieces of writing is to show our vulnerability so our readers can respond vulnerably as well (Behar, 1996). After readers connect to a story, there is always the potential for them to develop a desire to share their stories. After all, we all have stories to tell but might not feel comfortable enough to reveal them. As Behar explains:

New stories are rushing to be told in languages we’ve never used before, stories that tell the truths we once hid, truths we didn’t dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us (p. 33).

Once untold stories begin to surface, others are encouraged to share theirs. Good storytelling has the potential of unlocking dormant memories in people’s minds as they identify and recognize themselves in the stories of others. When writers share their stories they are guiding readers to join them in their journey to feel closer to the writer and sympathetic of the situations that they go through.
This research project aims to accomplish this. I wish my readers to accompany me in my journey through colonial experience, a journey that will hopefully motivate them to share their own untold stories. Further elaborating on how vulnerable writing evokes reader responses is Ellis (2004), who asserts:

You’d want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. You’d write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours. You’d want them to experience your experience as if it were happening to them (p. 116).

As the examples above illustrate, to be able to have this effect on readers, writers must find ways to relive certain moments in their lives to be able to write and reflect about them.

Vulnerable research relies on memory writing to recreate certain moments of the past so we can write and reflect about them from our present perspective. Memory writing is a very important, yet, problematic component of vulnerable writing since our present perspective will always cloud our memory (Ellis, 2004). As Ellis further explains:

Making memory is more complex is that it doesn’t work in a linear way, nor does life. I offer “Instead thoughts and feelings circle around us, flash back, then forward. The topical is interwoven with the chronological. Thoughts and feelings merge, drop from our grasp, then reappear in another context. In real life, we don’t always know when we know something. Events in the past are interpreted from our current position (p. 118).

Ellis reminds vulnerable researchers that we need to be aware that memories can never be recovered in their entirety since we will always recall and interpret experiences from our present point of view. In other words, what we did not know at the moment of the experience, we know now. Our experiences and the meaning that we attach to them teach us lessons that when recalled bring with them a new meaning because our thinking is constantly evolving. Therefore, even when our memories do not recapture the moment exactly the way it happened, memories are useful to recall the feelings and the significance we gave to the event.
Ellis also recommends that a way to overcome the challenge that memory writing presents could be by looking at the task not as a scientific one but rather as an artistic one. Elaborating on this, Ellis (2004) says:

If you viewed your project as closer to art than science, then your goal would not be so much to portray the facts of what happened to you accurately but instead to convey the meanings you attached to the experience (p.116).

As it is evidenced by the vulnerable researchers (Richardson, 1997; Behar, 1996; and Ellis, 2004) presented above, this type of research presents an alternative to those who wish to analyze the meanings and impact that particular experiences have had on their lives. Therefore, as a vulnerable researcher who wishes to explore the full impact of colonial experience on her life, my means of gathering data rely entirely on my memory and my reflections of them.

**Eliciting Data for this study**

In this study I used auto-biographical writing to elicit a more detailed and fuller account of my experiences as a Puerto Rican female English non-native teacher and researcher. This type of writing is effective for eliciting memories, emotionally difficult information, and perceptions of self (Derry 2005). I first wrote a narrative of how I became an English speaker and teacher. In the beginning, I only recalled experiences that I had with the English language, its speakers and what these interactions meant to me. As I kept expanding the narrative I noticed that feelings and details started coming back to me as I also started remembering other childhood experiences related to my education. The positive outcome of this writing experience encouraged me to continue to use auto-biographical writing as a research tool for this study. I did this guided by Ellis (2005) who recommends:

Whether you’re writing during, immediately after, or much later, I recommend that you start by taking retrospective field notes on your life, as Valerie did. Include all the details
you can recall. I find it helpful to organize my writing chronologically first, using the main events to structure the tale. I try to write daily, rereading what I wrote the day before, then filling in the new memories. Remember, you are creating the story; it is not there waiting to be found. Your final story will be crafted from these notes (p. 117).

The creating of these auto-biographical pieces of writing helped me elicit a more detailed and embodied description and analysis as I reflected on memories related to other aspects of my life.

Scholars (Anzaldúa 1987; Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; Richardson, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Peshkin, 2000; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006) who use auto-biographical writing as a tool of inquiry find it extremely effective to explore the underlying values, perceptions and assumptions that they have, as well as an effective way to examine, reflect and improve their teaching practice. Since the present study starts from my experience as a Puerto Rican English teacher and my own concern with the ways in which my socialization, schooling and training as a teacher informs my English teaching practice, the use of auto-biographical writing as knowledge is a useful research methodology to me because it involves selecting, ordering, shaping the complex interaction between the present self and the past self that is recalled throughout the different stages of my own personal history (Weiner 1998). Therefore, auto-biographical writing contributes to the improvement of my teaching practice because it allows me to explore values, perceptions and assumptions about knowledge, teaching and learning in relation to my teaching practice. Consequently, auto-biographical writing will make me become more reflexive in my practice. As Childs (2005), explains:

Becoming reflective practitioners involves a process of on-going critical reflection and self-study, involving an in-depth look at our experiences and ourselves. Our interpretations of experience are shaped by our assumptions and beliefs shape our decisions and our responses. Any investigation into one’s own practice should, therefore, be an account of uncovered assumptions and of on-going attempts to live up to one’s professed beliefs (p. 143).
In my case, since I have been socialized, schooled and formally trained as a teacher in a colonial context, it is important for me to attempt to connect my life, my context, and the impact of colonizing discourses in my life and my teaching practice. Therefore, auto-biographic pieces of writing provide me with an effective way to do so.

When teachers study and question their own taken-for-granted assumptions and situations, they gain a better understanding of the connection between lives and the impact that broader social processes have in students’ education. The experiences we offer our students, the materials that we choose for teaching and the ways we teach are all influenced by the way we experience the world. For this reason, auto-biographical writing is a useful tool for teachers who want to empower themselves and their students. Further elaborating on the responsibility that teachers have, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark:

> The study of education is the study of life, and we learn about life—for example the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions. We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life from thinking about education. This attention to experience and thinking about education as experience is part of what educators do at school (p.xxiv).

As a researcher and teacher, I wish to devote my life to contribute to change the social conditions of the social groups that I am part of. Further, I wish to approach my own communities with the utmost respect by engaging in research and teaching practices that will constantly remind me that anything I might analyze, interpret or teach is influenced not only by my own values and worldviews, but also by the way I have been trained to teach and do research. As Villenas (1996) remarks:

> The internalization of oppressive discourses relating to one’s own people, especially as a product of institutionalized education and university training, can lead to a disempowerement of the researcher and the researcher process (p. 273).
This type of writing allows me to share my self-positioning in the world and illustrate how this positioning influence the issues that are critical to me, and the theoretical frameworks and the methodologies that are useful to investigate these issues.

My secondary source of data are poems, vignettes and scenes that I created as a response to coursework, readings, experiences and interactions that I had during the time I lived in the U.S. These creative and very personal pieces of writing in English, Spanish and Spanglish allowed me to explore feelings and thoughts that had been overlooked or forgotten. Furthermore, these creative works made me reflect on my positioning in the world around me at different stages of my life. Most of these pieces emerged from reviewing and reflecting on the creative work that I produced for specifically three courses during my doctoral coursework. The first of these courses focused on Paulo Freire and the other two courses focused on the research methodologies known as narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography.

One of the reasons why these three courses had such a profound impact on me was because it was within these classrooms that I first experienced having a safe space where to share personal experiences and be able to sort out feelings, thoughts and perceptions about life, research, teaching and learning through artistic and creative work. Scholars who have engaged in self-study encourage the use of our own artwork to help us unlock difficult memories. Furthermore, the use of artwork is also effective when trying to understand perceptions of self and present data (Derry, 2005). Therefore, the creating, reviewing and reflecting on these creative and artistic works proved to be a useful tool to recall difficult memories and emotions that accompany them at the moment they were created. Moreover, they helped me reflect on past experiences and the significance that I attached to them at particular moments in my life journey.
As a result, these memories and emotions inspired the creation of the poems, scenes and vignettes that are used as the basis of my analysis for this project.

Even though Ellis (2004) argues that we can never fully recapture experience, her recommendation of viewing our projects as more of an artistic endeavor than as a scientific one was extremely useful to me. By doing so, vulnerable researchers can focus more on conveying the meanings attached to experiences rather than just to reporting the facts. For that reason, these means of data eliciting allowed me to identify those aspects of my life through which I experience the world and which would be the focus of analysis in this project. The ways in which I experience the world are: as Puerto Rican woman and as an English non-native teacher. Accordingly, these are the areas where I focused my analysis of lived experience so as to inquire into the impact of colonial experience in these areas of my life.

In the next chapter my inquiry into colonial experience begins. In the remaining chapters I rely on auto-biographical writing to explore and reflect on my socialization and education as a Puerto Rican and an English non-native teacher as I connect my personal experiences to those of others like myself who have experienced colonial experience.
Puerto Rico. 2:00pm. Living room. A seven year old dressed in her school uniform sits on the floor while she plays with a Barbie and a Ken doll. The smell of freshly brewed coffee fills the air. La abuela comes into the living room carrying two brightly colored plastic butter containers she uses as coffee mugs, one is green the other one is blue. Abuela sits on her sillón and offers the green plastic cup to the little girl.

"Gracias abuela!" I say as I take the mug she is offering me. "Did you make it with lots of espumita?"

"Yes, mija", with lots of espumita just the way you like it," she says as she looks at the clock on the wall and then at the TV. "Turn on the TV la novela is about to begin!"

"Voy," I say as I jump in front of the TV and turn it on and wait for the black and white image to appear. "What channel Abu?"

"Four" she says as she sips on her coffee.

"Can't wait to see what happens today! Monica and Juan love each other so much but that Aimee is soooo evil! I hate her!"

"I know! Let's see what she comes up with today. She thinks she can act like a man. You see mija, you have to be careful with women like her, who have crazy ideas about being equal to men." She pauses for a second before she continues, "Men are men and women are women! We're not the same! Women can't act like men! We are different!"

She smiles now and looks directly at me. "You need to understand that we're stronger and better than men. We rule our households while we raise the future citizens of this country. Our best kept secret is that even when we make our men believe that they rule the house, we are the ones who actually do it!"

"Is this hard to do abuela?" I ask as I sip on my coffee.

"Bueno mija", it is a very hard skill to master but it can be done. If you marry a good man like your grandfather," does the sign of the cross, "God bless him! She pauses before she continues, "who works hard and it's out of the house a lot, you can get away with it." She moves closer to me with her brow furrowed and says, "but if you get a good for nothing, it's a different story."

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23 Latin American soap operas.
24 Rocking chair.
25 Thanks grandma.
26 Foam.
27 Term of endearment used among Latina women which is short for mi hija, my daughter.
28 Coming!
29 Well, my daughter.
She moves closer to me as she says, “men are supposed to be good providers and when they’re not, they start fooling around and poor women like your mother have to break their back to support the family.” She looks at the TV as she sighs. “That’s why they are unaware of what’s going on right under their noses.”

“What do you mean Abi? What’s going on? Are you talking about papi?”

“No mija.” She moves away from me and looks at the TV before she says “forget I said it...look! A novela just begun.”

We both stare back at the TV sipping on our coffees in silence while I wonder what is my father up to now?

I remember how regardless of age or gender, watching _telenovelas_ with family and friends brought us together. I especially recall my parents and closest family and friends making bets and predictions about characters and situation outcomes. Unlike U.S. soap operas, _telenovelas_ last only a few months so as the final episode approach, these endings paralyze family and social activities and in the 1970’s and 1980’s were dealt with as national events. An interesting fact was that even when spectators knew what the outcome was going to be, people still watched the entire serial to find out how the characters would overcome their struggles and challenges. It was not unusual to see entire towns close down their local businesses early to gather around plazas and or neighborhoods to throw viewing parties so people could all share the event together. Even the local media featured pieces or interviews on predictions and reactions to these endings.

_Telenovelas_ have been entertaining Puerto Rican audiences for more than fifty years. Even though these serial narratives share many aspects with U.S. soap operas in terms of origins, development, and melodramatic elements, contrary to their U.S. counterparts they have become the one of the most important television genres in Latin America and other parts of the world. These serials began to develop during the 1940’s when laundry detergent and soap companies realized the importance of the radio as their means to advertise their products. The introduction of serial narratives was their first attempt to reach the larger number of potential consumers of
their products: housewives. As these companies tried to expand to the Latin American market, they realized that they needed to adapt these serials specifically for Latin American audiences due to cultural, religious and language differences between U.S. producers and those in these Spanish-speaking countries. It took these companies over ten years and long periods of negotiation with local Latin American companies, to be able to sponsor *radionovelas* in Cuba, Mexico and Puerto Rico during the 1950’s. As it was expected, the serials became popular among Latin American audiences and when television replaced the radio as the most popular means of mass communication, the serials successfully made their transition to television.

However, unlike U.S. produced soap operas, throughout the years, Latin American *telenovelas* have become much more important in Latin America and other parts of the world. At this moment, almost every Latin American country produces and exports *telenovelas*. Countries such as, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Puerto Rico produce, buy and export *telenovelas* to other parts of the world. The *telenovela* market is so competitive that one could say that for actors and actresses involved within this medium, this market has become the Latin American equivalent to Hollywood. In other words, when a Latino/a artist is cast in a telenovela, the event is as important as when a famous Hollywood artist is cast in a blockbuster film.

There are four main types of *telenovelas*: (1) the historical romance; (2) the musical *telenovela*; (3) the teenage romance; and (4) the working class melodrama. The working class melodrama is the most popular type of *telenovela* that there is since most of their plots combine human and social narratives that seem believable to audiences all over the world. An example of this can be seen in *Los Ricos Tambien Lloran*[^1] one of Mexico’s most successful *telenovelas* ever produced. This *telenovela* chronicled the social and romantic struggles of an orphan girl who marries a man from a rich family. This telenovela became popular in places as far as Italy,

[^1]: The Rich Also Cry, 1977.
Abidjan, Philippines, and Russia during the 1980’s where it became one of the highest rated programs ever. According to Baldwin (1995), this *telenovela* was so successful because it served as a “mass psychotherapy that replaced real stress with artificial stress” (p. 287) at a time when Russia was undergoing a period of political transformation. In other words, audiences would forget their everyday problems by escaping to an alternate reality in which the problems and struggles could be overcome by the protagonists. This could be attributed to the fact that like many Hollywood romantic comedies, *telenovelas* are based on fairy tale motifs and are centered on a romantic couple and the challenges that they must overcome in order to be together.

Most of working class *novelas* abide to the following premise: two heterosexual young lovers fall in love and have to overcome society, parents, institutions, and villains in order to fulfill their love. The female protagonist is beautiful, innocent to “the ways of the world” and from a low or working class background. The male protagonist is usually an attractive young man from a upper social class whose behavior and morals are juxtaposed with those of the female protagonist. In the case of the antagonist character, one of the protagonists is romantically involved with them and when for a particular reason the relationship comes to an end, the spurned person becomes the villain who will make the protagonists’ and everybody else’s lives miserable until the very last episode of the *novela* when they either die, go to jail or go crazy. But regardless of the outcome, the villain always gets punished. For audiences, the most important part of participating in this is that being able to witness how the protagonists share a final kiss as we [the audience] imagine the happiness that they will share forever. However, what

31 There were a few exceptions such as Rina, *La Heredera* (The Heiress), Betty, *La Fea* (Ugly Betty), the protagonist started off as either a woman with physical disabilities or an “ugly duckling” whose looks were transformed by cosmetic surgery or “makeovers” in order to become more socially accepted.

32 At times the female protagonists were actually the illegitimate daughters of one of the older main characters who were either given away or stolen at the beginning of the *telenovela*. 
these audiences are not aware of is the extent to which this popular genre is used to promote particular ideas about femininity, masculinity and gender roles in society.


**Teaching la nena as ser nena** with telenovelas

I learned to love *telenovelas* through my maternal grandmother, who I consider to be one of the most significant female figures in my life. Moreover, I consider my grandmother to be the first teacher that I ever had. Even though she had no formal training as such, she was very good at teaching “life lessons” and supporting these lessons with examples and situations that I could relate to in real life through *telenovela* situations. For this reason, I consider my grandmother to be the first model that I had of a teacher. As the vignette at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, during my *telenovela* interactions with my *abuela*, we discussed much more than just the plot of the serial. Our conversations could easily move from being about characters or the plot of the story to lessons on gender politics. The casualness with which my maternal grandmother and I discussed the situations in these serials had a long lasting impact on me. Sharing these *mujer a mujer* moments with my grandmother taught me about life as a woman and about the behaviors that were expected of me as such.

Every time we talked about *novelas* with other women, they all agreed that *telenovelas* were accurate in their portrayal of women’s lives. For that reason, I developed a sense of closeness to these women with whom I shared these *novelas* but also everyday situations that we went through together. Accordingly, just like I did with telenovela characters, I also suffered these women’s struggles, sadness and shared their happiness when they succeeded. To me, life became like a *telenovela*, where I was the protagonist and the personal struggles that I

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33 The little girl how to be a girl.
34 Woman to woman.
encountered could be dealt with by following the models presented to me through the TV and around me. There was one point during my adolescence and early twenties when I actually made decisions regarding my romantic life based on occurrences I had seen in the serials because I was certain that if it had worked for the characters, it would certainly work for me.

Looking back at the experience, I realize that my interactions with my grandmother contributed to my understandings of how the world around me worked (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989). Furthermore, as I reflect on the experience, I also see how my interactions with abuela are a clear example of how hegemony works. According to Brookfied (2005), hegemony influences people to support the very ideas that oppress them. As the vignette illustrates, hegemony was very much present during my interactions with my grandmother and the way in which my grandmother passed on to me her contradictory understandings about women and their roles in society. One of abuela’s teachings that stayed me for many years was the idea that there were two types of women: las buenas y las malas. I attribute my supporting of this idea to the strict Catholic upbringing that we shared as Puerto Ricans which fostered in us a very limited view of women and our position in the world. Catholicism in P.R. was introduced by Spanish colonizers and was one of the means by which Spaniards brought about “civilization” to the Taíno indigenous people. At the time religion was used to justify the Spain’s colonial project and the unequal treatment of indigenous people, African Slaves, mestizos and women. What I find fascinating from the memory of our interaction is how even though we both seemed to understand the idea that women could negotiate their roles and positions in society, at times, we could not view ourselves beyond the two categories that we had learned as Puerto Rican women. In other words, even when we knew the extent of our importance as women and what we were capable of achieving as heads of households and mothers, we still limit ourselves by conforming

\footnote{Refering to the type of woman: the good and the bad.}
to abusive and oppressive conditions and relationships. This is a clear example of how as women, at times we support the very ideas and ways of thinking that oppress and limit us.

Religion also played a very important part in the way in which I constructed my notions of gender and gender roles as I conformed to live and play the roles that I believed I was assigned by God and society. Growing up, these ideas were constantly reinforced by the people around me. I remember listening to my family members, vecinos, and friends’ conversations and feeling unable to live and act differently because I felt that my behavior was under constant scrutiny of family and peers. As women, we were being constantly compared to one another and when one of us did not behave appropriately, we would be threatened by our elders with the idea that we would be rejected and labeled by society. As a devout Catholic, there were times when these behaviors and ways of thinking fostered in me the fear of being categorized as a “bad” woman. For that reason, I spent most of my childhood, adolescence and a great part of my adult life trying to please others as I follow the behaviors that were expected of me as a mujer buena.

These behaviors were being constantly modeled by the women around me, in real life and on television.

My interactions with my grandmother and other women fostered in me limiting ideas such as, the notion that God would always punish women who dare become too independent or outspoken. According to my family, women who challenged the rules of religion and society would be labeled and punished in this life or the other. Among those women there were unwed mothers, divorced women, cortejas and married women who cheated on their husbands. According to my grandmother, all of these women fit into the bad women category. After years

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36 Neighbors
37 A good woman.
38 The afterlife.
39 This word refers to mistresses to married men.
of accepting and supporting this belief, I now come to terms with the realization that it took me a broken engagement, a failed marriage, becoming a mother, and pursuing a doctoral degree away from my family and country to become a woman who would dare challenge these limiting categories. At this moment in my life, I see these so called “bad” women of my younger days as women who were misjudged by society for being strong enough to live as they wished to live. As a critical thinker, I now believe that what these women did was contest the very roles and rules of “normal” behavior that were instilled in them by their family and society. Their challenging behavior was their means to break away from restricting patterns and relationships that did not allow them to thrive in their lives. Moreover, by disrupting the social and religious rules and categories that society had assigned them, society had chosen to dismiss them as sinners, or wayward women by the very society that had nurtured them.

While growing up, something that always made me uncomfortable was seeing how those who so easily judged these women claimed to be God-fearing Christians who did not practice what they were preaching. What bothered me the most was seeing how when one of our own fell from grace, women became more ruthless in their treatment of these women than the men. If one of them came across one of these “fallen women” they chose to not relate nor understand them and rather judge by them based on their religious and social standards. One thing that always troubled me was how these religious women felt so righteous when passing judgement on other women without even considering on the conditions that led them to act the way they did. As I reflect on the experience, I come to terms with the idea that perhaps the women around me also struggled with the idea that unlike themselves, perhaps these “bad” women were brave enough to resist being silenced, mistreated and taken advantage of by society, religion and their men.
In P.R., machismo is as common as it is in other countries in the world. Puerto Rican society views and treats women differently based on the Western notion that women are naturally different from men. In other words, Puerto Ricans around me considered men to be the strong providers who were allowed to do anything because they were responsible for sustaing and defending their families while “their” women served them as passive sexual partners and nurturers (Weedon, 1999). The reason why I think I felt uncomfortable with the idea of judging “bad” women so harshly was based on conversations I eavesdropped on during family, church and other social gatherings. I remember feeling confused by the fact that even when these women seemed to have strong personalities and ruled their household with an iron fist, many of them were physically or psychologically abused by their men. The only time I dared to confront my abuela to question this, she very eloquently explained that God allowed this to happen because women had come into this world to suffer. According to her, thanks to Eve’s indiscretion in the Garden of Eden, we were supposed to pay justas por pecadoras. She added that the advantage that women gained from enduring this suffering was that it would contribute to build our character and prepare us for our everlasting life of happiness in heaven. To her, these sufferings were necessary to prepare us to tolerate our pruebas in life because as any good Catholic knew, God would always find a way to reward the good ones and punish the bad ones in this life or the other.

This was one of those life lessons that she supported with examples straight out from telenovelas since in novelas good women were rewarded for their actions during the last episode. However, when I question my grandmother why some women were not rewarded for their

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40 Male chauvinism
41 This phrase refers to all women being considered sinners and that regardless if we are righteous or sinners, we all have to pay Eve’s offense of tempting Adam to sin with pain and suffering.
42 Tests in life.
suffering in this life, she would reply that there were people who God chose to reward in the after life and that they would have to wait until their death to find out why. According to abuela, Christians needed to be patient and wait until that moment but as long as we abide the laws of men and church [in my case if I was a good woman who was silent, obedient, and submissive to my man and society] all the suffering would pay off since this would assure my entrance to heaven and not eternal damnation like it would happen to *la gente mala*\(^{43}\) that we saw in *telenovelas*.

Even when I realize now that at times that my grandmother’s ideas and actions were contradictory, as a critical thinker, reflecting on my interactions with my grandmother and other women in my life forces me to acknowledge that the discourses and institutions that shaped my thinking, such as culture, religion, my family and schooling have also produced contradictory effects on me, and as a result, they have served as sources of disempowerment and autonomy, repression and privilege (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez and Villenas, 2006). My interactions with *las mujeres de mi vida* and members of my culture whether when watching a *telenovela* or during my interactions with them were the vehicles for embracing and perpetuating in me hegemonic discourses about women roles, stereotypical representations of femininity and false expectations about love, but also presented me with the possibility of consider the home as a site of struggle since is mostly here where women first negotiate their positions, roles and notions of romantic love during our gender construction process.

I now acknowledge that the situations and interactions that I observed around me at home fostered in me a sense of insecurity and anxiety that at times was very constraining since I was constantly tormented with the idea that if I misbehaved or disobeyed I could also be

\(^{43}\) Bad people.
categorized as a “bad” woman. For that reason I chose to obey those rules that my family, religion, school and society expected me to respect as a Puerto Rican woman. I also chose not to voice my opinions or disobey any authority figure. Based on these experiences, I constructed my views of the behavior that was expected of me as a woman. Evidently, I aspired to become a buena mujer and tried to live by these standards most of my life. Still, even as a little girl I thought this was unfair. But who was I to say anything? I was just a girl who was learning how to become mujer and as such I was constantly instructed by my female models that calladita te ves mas bonita. So silencing my thoughts and keeping them to myself became part of my life. All I was expected at that moment was to wait for my future to unfold before me, a future that I was expected not to question, but to embrace with open arms. Throughout my life I witnessed within my own family and my friends, how women tolerated infidelity, addictions and mistreatments in order to keep their “families” together for the sake of appearances or their children. For many of these women divorce would have been a blessing, but many were too afraid to confront their own mothers and society because according to these people, divorced women could become free-spirited women and that for them, was the ultimate transgression.

My mother was—for a long time—one of these women, who feared confronting her own fear of her mother and el que diran by filing for a divorce. For twelve years, she tolerated my father’s immature behavior, his infidelities and lack of commitment to our family until she decided that she had had enough. After all, she was the one supporting our family since my father’s unstable behavior always affected his tenure at all the jobs he held. So, the moment my mother came to the realization that she did not need a man in her life to survive, she filed for divorce. Needless to say, my grandmother was appalled by her decision. She did not want to

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44 If you remain silent you look prettier.
45 What would people say, in other words, those around her, society.
accept that her own child would be labeled as a “bad” woman. This is one of the reasons why my mother wanted me to have a good education, because she wanted me to be able to be financially independent in case history repeated itself with me. Her courage to confront her mother and society at a time when divorced women were stigmatized is one of the most valuable lessons that I learned from my mother. My mother’s experience with my father also taught me that in Puerto Rican society, when it came to men there seemed to be more tolerance than for women since unlike women “bad” men who could be redeemed by love just like those in the telenovelas that we watched. This was an option that women did not have and which I found troubling. Men always had the potential to be redeemed but women did not. To my grandmother and other women in my family, men like my grandfather who held stable jobs to support their families, were reliable, respectful of their wives, and fearful of God, fell into the good man category. In my grandmother’s view, my grandfather embodied all the qualities that made him a good man. Accordingly, to her, the “good for nothing” men were those who did not hold steady jobs and who had too much free time on their hands which made them prone to fall into bad habits or to cheating on their wives. Apparently, she had placed my father in this category.

To understand why, let us look at the circumstances surrounding my parent’s marriage. My grandmother had always expected my mother to marry somebody like my grandfather. So when my mother fell in love with my father, a thirty year old man [my mother was seventeen] who was not only older, but who was also divorced man with five children from his previous marriage, my grandmother’s dreams for my mother’s future husband came crumbling down. Even when she did everything she could to keep them apart, my parents kept seeing each other and when my grandmother became aware that the relationship was still going on, it was “too late” because my mother was already pregnant with me. This event called for an immediate
marriage, a fact that totally shattered my grandmother’s dreams of her daughter marrying a “good man”. Even though my grandmother did not have the best opinion of my father at first, over the years, her opinion about him changed. This happened after my parents divorced, because he proved to be an excellent father and provider even after he remarried and had other children. To her, the quality that had redeemed my father in her eyes was his love for his children since he divorced my mother but not us. Even when my parent’s story seems like something straight out of a novela, what is worth noting is that like many of the protagonists in telenovelas, in my grandmother’s eyes [and my own], my father started out as an immature man who after his divorce from my mother, had realized that he needed to change his way of relating to his children if he wanted to remain close to us. My own father’s transformation into what was considered a “good” father also impacted the notions I had about romantic love.

By the time I reached adolescence, I could not wait to fall in love, so I could find my “own” man and be able to apply all the “knowledge” that these life and fictional experiences had taught me about men, women and romantic relationships. Needless to say, I have had more than one opportunity to do so, since many of the same situations I saw around me became manifest in my own life. As I reflect back on how I responded to these experiences, I realize that I have spent practically my entire romantic life involved in relationships where I have tolerated, conformed and suffered for the sake of “el que diran” to avoid being classified as a “bad” woman.

However, I also realize that not all I learned from my grandmother and novelas had a negative impact on me. Reflecting on the experience, I realize that although at one point I did embrace hegemonic discourses about women presented to me via family and telenovelas, I also experienced moments in which I developed a sensibility to women’s needs and our ways of
coping with these through solidarity with one another regardless of culture, religion and language. Moreover, since *telenovelas* focused on the domestic realm, relationships and emotions I was able to relate more to other women than I would have done if I had been denied the opportunity. Even though it took me years to overcome the contradictory and restricting messages that *las mujeres de mi vida* and *telenovelas* presented to me, it were the real interactions with other women what taught me the complex and multi-layered lives that women live (The Latina Feminist Group, 2004). Women are strong and resilient beings who struggle with oppression, repression, and silence on a daily basis and yet, are still capable of finding ways to negotiate their roles and oppressive conditions at both the domestic and the public space. Women begin to resist their constricting conditions by acknowledging that institutions and discourses that surround us produce contradictory effects on us. That together we can work towards a better future for women when we support each other and create spaces where are allowed to discuss the contradictions that are part of our lives. Finally, that those same spaces help us pass on our women’s knowledge to younger generations to avoid the perpetuation of our unjust conditions.

My grandmother was right about something, as mothers and nurturers, we can foster and create better situations for our children. In other words, we can create a better future since we are responsible for nurturing and educating the future citizens of our country. Even though our teachings could be contradictory at times, once these contradictions are acknowledged, we can teach our children to look beyond what people or models present to them. By doing so they can be able to break away from constraining relationships that do not allow them to be. In my particular case, growing up in a household where males were rarely present required the women I
grew around with to become a stronger presence, and that alone showed me the power that as women we have.

Regardless of how narrow-minded some of my grandmother’s and family teachings and behavior were a valuable lesson I gathered from my interactions with her was the realization of the responsibility that we have as women. According to my grandmother, women were more powerful than men because our bodies could endure the pains of menstruation and labor, which prepared us for the most important task ahead of us: being a mother and nurturer of the future citizens of our country. To her, this gave us women the upper hand. All of our lives were a preparation for the utmost responsibility a citizen could have: shaping the lives of the future citizens of our country. My grandmother considered women to be the foundation of our society and as such we needed to be stronger, solidary and resilient so we could succeed in this task at the domestic or the public space, but not on both. Narrow minded at times, wise at others, as the first teacher that I encountered in my life, her contradictory life lessons taught me that women’s experiences are complex and should be taken into account when looking at the conditions those who deal with oppression and injustice.

While I know that there is still a long way for women to really achieve equality in Puerto Rican society, the act of voicing and reflecting on my experience as a woman allows me to not only reflect on what I have learned, supported and walked away from, but that also allows me to feel part of the larger discourse community of women who might have encountered similar conditions. This idea encourages the sharing with other women from different cultures and languages the idea that regardless of our cultural and linguistic differences, as women, we have the right to grow up and be educated in communities where our struggles, abilities and ways of knowing are honored. By honoring these, our communities will begin to focus on more positive
community relationships today and tomorrow. May the honoring of our women’s ways pave the way to lead others into their personal journeys to discover and heal their colonial wounds.

In the next chapter, I describe Puerto Rico’s colonial wound and how this wound impacted my worldview and education.
CHAPTER FIVE:
GROWING UP PUERTO RICAN

US superior
PR inferior

Nos pusieron zapatos
They put shoes on us
Nos dieron techos
They put roofs on our houses
Nos ayudaron
They helped us

¿qué sería de nosotros sin ellos?
Where would we be without them?
Estaríamos perdidos.
We would be lost.
Ellos trajeron civilización a nuestro salvajismo
They brought civilization to our savagery

No eramos humanos
We weren’t human
No usábamos zapatos
We didn’t use any shoes

Estábamos sucios
We were dirty
Ignorantes
 ignorant

Ellos traen orden al caos.
They bring order to the chaos.

Nancy Vanessa Vicente, 2005
**Puerto Rico’s colonial wound**

Puerto Rico (P.R.) is a Caribbean island that was a colony of Spain for more than four hundred years. As other colonies of Spain in the New World, most of the population consists of a combination of people of European, African and Taino indigenous descent. Like most of the rest of the countries in Latin America, the language spoken by the majority is Spanish and the religion most widely practiced is Catholicism. According to Duany (2000), by the end of the nineteenth century, P.R. had experienced “the longest period of Hispanic influence in the region” (p. 1), which was reflected in the well-defined national identity and a strong sense of culture that Puerto Ricans had at the time of the United States (U.S.) invasion[^46]. Nevertheless, this national identity and sense of culture had been shaped by four hundred years of colonial relationship with Spain.

The colonial relationship with Spain proved to be detrimental for the Island (Van Middeldydk, 1903; Osuna, 1949; Morris, 1995; Urcioli, 1996) since it was based on the political, economic and social injustices commonly associated with colonialism. During the Spanish-American War (1898), these detrimental conditions became obvious to United States (U.S.) troops during their invasion of the Island. The troops led by General Nelson A. Miles[^47] encountered little or no resistance from islanders who received the troops with open arms[^48] due to their yearning for political, economic and social justice (Trias Monge, 1997). As Miles and his troops moved inland, they noticed that the Island had a population that seemed to be overcrowded, malnourished and uneducated (Torres-Gonzalez, 2002). At the moment, it

[^46]: See (Van Middeldydk, 1903; Osuna, 1949, Algren-Gutierrez, 1987; Morris; 1995; Urcioli, 1996; Trias Monge, 1997; Pousada, 1999; Torres-Gonzalez, 2002).

[^47]: U.S. general who gained recognition for his military campaigns against Native Americans.

[^48]: According to Trias Monge, (1997), newspapers referred to the invasion as a “military picnic”.
appeared that the U.S. was going to play an important role in the attainment of political, economic and social justice for the Island. This idea was further reinforced by General Miles when he publicly proclaimed:

In the prosecution of the war against the kingdom of Spain by the people of the United States, in the cause of liberty, justice and humanity, its military forces have come to occupy the island of Porto Rico…They have not come to make war on the people of the country, who for centuries have been oppressed, not only to yourselves; but on the contrary, to bring protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property, promote your prosperity and bestow the immunities and blessings of our enlightenment and liberal institutions and government (quoted in Osuna, 1949 p. 259).

Statements such as his nourished Puerto Ricans’ hopes for change as they looked upon U.S. soldiers as the representatives of a nation that enjoyed a full amount of the liberties and privilege that Puerto Ricans sought from Spain for many years (Van Middeldyk, 1903).

The Treaty of Paris ended the war and P.R. was ceded\(^\text{49}\) to the U.S along with Philippines and Guam in the Pacific. At first, Spain resisted handing over P.R. to the U.S. due to its strategic position in the Caribbean. According to Morris (1995), during Spanish occupation, P.R. had become one of Spain’s most important military settlements due to its location at the entrance to the Caribbean Sea. Nevertheless, the U.S. was very interested in gaining control over P.R. even when they seemed to be more interested in Cuba than in P.R. Because Cuba is geographically closer to the U.S., its political future was more important to the U.S. than that of P.R. As Trías Monge (1997) explains:

When the Spanish South American territories started their wars of independence, the United States became rightly fearful that England or France would attempt to take over Cuba…

Preoccupation with Cuba was thus one of the principal considerations which led to the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine on December 2, 1823, declaring that any European nation’s effort to extend its dominion in the hemisphere or act contrary to the independence of the new republics that had been colonies of Spain would be seen as unfriendly and dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States (p. 22).

\(^{49}\) Given away as a “botin de guerra”.

The Monroe Doctrine definitively contributed to the growing of the U.S. as a country and was also the moment when the expansionist doctrine that is now known as the Manifest Destiny became popular. Further commenting on the development of Manifest Destiny, Trías Monge writes:

Growth of the United States on the continent had occurred rapidly. The United States made the Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803 and Florida from Spain in 1819. Continental expansion was completed upon the acquisition of Texas in 1845, the cession by Britain of the territory of Oregon in 1846, and the acquisition of the Mexican territory through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the Gadsden Treaty of 1853...Expansionist feelings receded during the Civil War, but later reacquired vigor, especially in the 1890’s... (p. 23)

In 1898, U.S. expansion in the Caribbean began as a result of the Spanish-American War. According to Urcioli (1996), this war was hastily started, fought and finished in just four months [April to August 1898]. Accordingly, the war made it possible for the U.S. to get Cuba under their (U.S.) protection. This proved to be an advantage for the U.S. as these actions expanded their control of additional areas in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Since by the end of the war, Cuba was [in principle] independent but under U.S. sponsorship, it was then when the U.S. started to direct its attention to P.R. When the U.S. took control of P.R., a military government was established in order to support an Americanization project⁵⁰ that would transform the island into a model of democracy in the Caribbean (Urcioli, 1998). It is important to remember that P.R. was coming out of its colonial status under Spain, so starting a colonial relationship with a country that had a completely different language, culture and religion was received with “mixed feelings” by the general population (Osuna, 1949).

On the one hand, the Island’s economic and social situation was extremely miserable. According to Osuna (1949), more than 75% of the population was illiterate with an intellectual

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⁵⁰ Policies created and implemented by the U.S. government which supported practices that led colonized Puerto Ricans, Guamanians and Filipinos to “learn” how to become “Americans”.
elite made up of lawyers, doctors and engineers, who had studied in Europe and the U.S. The fact that P.R. became a colony of a country that at the moment was developing into one of the most powerful nations in the world was very alluring to Puerto Ricans. For the U.S. the newly acquired possession also seemed alluring in the sense that “once acquired, Puerto Rico was clearly an economic and military asset” (Urciolli, 1998, p. 43) due to its proximity to Panama. The Isthmus of Panama would be the future location of a canal that once built and controlled by the U.S. would guarantee U.S. full naval domination of the Caribbean Sea and of the Pacific Ocean.

On the other hand, there were the obvious differences between the two nations: language, religion and culture. As the Island made the transition from one colonial power (Spain) to another (U.S.) there was the question of the extent to which this new association would affect Puerto Rican lives as the new ruler dealt with a colony mainly formed by an illiterate, culturally and racially mixed, Spanish-speaking population. Hence, it seems that the “Americanization” of Puerto Ricans became the U.S. response to this question. According to the 1899 census, 77.3% of the population of over ten years of age was illiterate (Caban, 1999) who seemed to be culturally passive. In addition, since they spoke a variety of Spanish which the new colonizers considered an “unintelligible patois which possessed no literature and little value as an intellectual medium” (U.S. Senate, 1900:51, quoted from Torres-González, p.103), U.S. officials considered implementing a U.S. traditional educational public school system in which “American” values would be emphasized along with English as the medium of instruction in schools, Puerto Ricans would easily transform into “compliant subjects who would passively accept U.S. domination” (Walsh, 1991, p. 7).
In spite of this, the U.S. colonial educational system encountered a lot of resistance from local teachers, students and parents since they did not always share the colonial administrator’s vision of transforming Puerto Rican colonial subjects into second-class “American” citizens (Del Moral, 2006) via English teaching. Evidence of this resistance can be seen in the constant changes in language policies regarding the status of English as the medium of instruction in the public school system\(^{51}\) during the first forty years of U.S. colonization. Without a doubt, Puerto Ricans teachers’ opposition to embrace English as their language of instruction presented a problem for U.S. administrators. This was also problematic for English teachers since the colonial discourse associated with English (Phillipson, 1991; Pennycook, 1998) set up both languages into binary positions as the languages became markers of U.S. and Puerto Rican culture respectively.

One of the reasons why Puerto Ricans resisted English as their language of instruction came as a result of Puerto Ricans considering themselves, Puerto Ricans first and U.S. citizens second (Trias Monge, 1997; Duany, 2000). Furthermore, though Puerto Ricans recognize English as an important language to acquire, the learning of English is still perceived by many as un mal necesario\(^{52}\) due to the power and prestige that English has acquired worldwide. Finally, since English colonial discourse places English and its native speakers in a more priviledged position than those from “other” languages and cultures, its teaching and learning presents a problem for both teachers and learners since perceptions of English, U.S. culture, Spanish and Puerto Rican culture has led to tensions in Puerto Rican English classrooms.

\(^{51}\) For a more detailed description of the language debate in P.R. see Osuna (1950), Algren-Gutierrez (1987); Pousada (1999); Velez (1999) and Torres Gonzalez (2002).
\(^{52}\) A necessary evil or a hassle.
As a Puerto Rican English teacher\textsuperscript{53} I am fully aware of these tensions. Thus, in the following section, I explore how some of these tensions manifested themselves within my home and school space.

\textit{My colonial wound}

The poem at the beginning of this chapter illustrates some of the ideas that I acquired while growing up in colonial P.R. These ideas were first introduced by my family and later on supported during my schooling experience. As a result, I came to believe that P.R. and Puerto Rican culture were inferior to that of the U.S. I also grew up believing that Puerto Ricans needed to be grateful to the U.S. for “civilizing” Puerto Ricans. But how did I come to such distorted understandings of my country and my people?

Most of the notions I had about Puerto Rican culture and Puerto Ricans were shaped by my interactions with family, teachers and classmates. Many of the stories they shared with me emphasized how upon the arrival of U.S. troops, the group of people that \textit{los gringos} encountered were “backwards”, “docile” and uneducated people since they walked around dirty, barefoot, and lived in huts with their big families. I also learned from them that Puerto Ricans needed to be grateful to \textit{los americanos} since they put shoes on us and had provided us with a public school system that would save us from our “backwardness” (Said, 1978). According to scholars who have closely studied the first years of U.S. occupation of the Island, most Puerto Ricans were indeed illiterate and malnourished, however, it was the small intellectual elite\textsuperscript{54} who believed that Puerto Ricans were not ready for self-government (Osuna, 1950; Morris, 1995; 98

\textsuperscript{53} For the purpose of this study, this term refers to the teacher of English who is born, raised and educated as an English teacher in Puerto Rico and whose first language is Spanish.

\textsuperscript{54} Composed of doctors, lawyers and writers.
Trias Monge, 1997; Duany, 2000; Briggs, 2002; Del Moral, 2006). This was one of the reasons why the elite supported the U.S. military government which they believed it would bring order to the chaos around them. To them, 

55 scrawny looking Puerto Ricans seemed to need a “benevolent father” who could take care of these mistreated “children”. These ideas are another example of how colonial/hegemonic discourse works on colonized peoples. The poem at the beginning then illustrates the ideas I was passed on by my family and my culture and which I learned to embrace. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2005) remark, the colonial system and the hierarchies that emerge from the colonial encounter foster issues of self-worth on the colonized that lead them to embrace metaphors such as that of the parent/child to justify the colonial project. As a result, a colonial mindset is promoted and sustained by the very people who are affected by it.

Since the military government seemed to be improving the local conditions, the second phase of the U.S. colonial project began when an “American” public educational system was implemented. This was done in order to teach Puerto Ricans to read, write, learn about personal hygiene, nutrition and also learn more U.S. history, so Puerto Ricans could learn to appreciate the greatness of the country that had come to “save” them from Spanish injustice and themselves. According to Del Moral (2006), the three main goals of this colonial school system were: (1) to “Americanize Puerto Ricans; (2) to create “tropical Yankees”; (3) and the formation of a new generation of supporters of U.S. colonialism on the island. Yet, one of the first challenges that colonial administrators encountered was that the instruction of Puerto Ricans was going to be carried out in English, a language that was completely unknown to Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans. According to Walsh (1991), the most important function of the Puerto Rican public school system was to carry out the “Americanization” of Puerto Ricans through the English

55 The intellectual elite.
language. Therefore, English-spea king teachers were brought from the U.S. to teach and train local teachers. At first, these teachers were mostly male who came with the military forces, but as the number of schools grew, it was necessary to recruit female teachers from the Mainland. It must be noted that most of these female teachers had taught on reservations and were considered “true patriots” by the first Commissioner of Education. However, even though the curriculum implemented on the Island relied on textbooks, materials and methods that had successfully been used with Native Americans (Crawford, 2000), within the first few years of its implementation, it became clear that—in P.R.—local teachers had another agenda in mind. This agenda was one that would transform Puerto Ricans into healthy, moral, and an intelligent community of citizens worthy of composing the future Puerto Rican nation (Del Moral, 2006). Nevertheless, local teachers negotiating teaching a curriculum that did not include any mention of local history prior to the arrival of the U.S. troops and which completely erased the indigenous, Spanish, and African past of Puerto Ricans and which the only heroes and patriots important enough to be taught were those from the U.S. (Walsh, 1991) in exchange of getting the knowledge and the skills that would prepare Puerto Ricans for self-government. This was the school system that my grandparents experienced since they were among the first Puerto Ricans who took advantage of the new mandatory and free educational system that los americanos had implemented. According to my grandparents thanks to this educational system, Puerto Ricans were now civilized and able to live the “American dream”

As a member of Puerto Rican culture and my family, the attainment of the “American” dream became one of my family’s biggest concerns. For that reason, family members taught younger members not only the socially and culturally accepted rules and values that our

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56 For a more detailed account please refer to Pousada, 2000; Torres Gonzalez, 2002.
57 This is the term that my grandparents used to refer to gringos or white anglos.
community supported and shared, but also instilled in us a love for education which they considered a gift that *estadounidenses* had bestowed upon us so we could achieve the “American dream. Their teachings contributed to the constructions of knowledge that I engaged in while growing up. As a critical thinker, I now reflect on how unaware my family members were of the everlasting impact that their ideas and values had on us. An example of this can be seen in the previous chapter where I explored the impact that my interactions with the women in my life had on my gender construction process and my worldview about women’s roles. This illustrates how from a very early age children begin to construct their knowledge based on the behavior that they observe and the ideas that are presented to them—directly or indirectly—by parents and other family members.

Another example of the outcomes of this learning process can be seen in the poem at the beginning of this chapter which was inspired by some of the ideas and values I was taught by my family while growing up in P.R. Since this dissertation focuses on exploring my own colonial wound and my journey to become aware of it, I now explore in more detail how the ideas presented in the poem were shaped.

*Living both the “American” dream and the Puerto Rican nightmare*

I am product of a Puerto Rican working-class Catholic family. While growing up, I knew that my family was not rich, but was not poor either. I grew up knowing that we were sort of in-between because although we did not live in a mansion, we did not live in a *poor barrio* or a project either. We lived in a urbanización\(^{58}\) which according to my family, were perfect for raising children because they were safer than living downtown or in a project and because the

\(^{58}\) Sub-division.
neighbors there were people like us\textsuperscript{59}. As part of this community, it did not take long for me to learn that like most of my neighbors’ kids, I was destined to attend a Catholic private school. However, when the time came for my family to decide which Catholic school I would attend, they decided that I was going to attend the most prestigious Catholic school in my hometown. When I found out about this I felt very uncomfortable because I knew that I was going to be all alone in that school since none of my close friends attended that school. My parents tried to ease the uneasiness I felt by reassuring me that I was luckier than my friends because the best teachers were in that school.

In other words, my family believed that thanks to the privileged education I was going to receive, the doors of opportunity would open up for me. Looking back, I realize that they were right. Although I cannot recall the exact moment when my family decided my educational future every time I accomplish something in my life I cannot help but to reflect on the significance that their decision of choosing that particular private Catholic school has had in my life. In retrospect, it seems that their combined efforts to finance my education in this prestigious institution paid off since here I am on the brink of attaining a doctoral degree in a prestigious university in the U.S. Yet, there are times when I question whether the outcome would have been different if I had been the product of the Puerto Rican public school system. This also makes me think about how my privileged education gave me an advantage over those friends of mine who attended other schools.

Being a product of privileged educational system also makes me wonder how as we go through our socializing and schooling processes, the perceptions, values, and assumptions of those in privileged positions are filtered to us via family, teachers and student relationships (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989; Walsh 1991; Shannon, 1992; Giroux 2001). That said, as a

\textsuperscript{59} Policemen, factory workers, secretaries, nurses, and teachers
teacher, I feel compelled to question how aware we are and in what ways do we respond to the presence of these elements as we participate in the educational process of our students. While some researchers have taken an active role in sharing information about the constraining impact of colonialism and traditional schooling processes (Freire 1970; McLaren 1989; Walsh 1991; Shannon 1992, Diaz-Soto, 1997; Méndez-Bernal, 1997; Giroux 2001; Macedo 2003) on student’s lives, this information still does not reach those teachers who could benefit from understanding the impact that colonialism, traditional schooling, and the teacher/students relations it upholds, have in students’ lives. For that reason, in what follows, I explore the constraining impact that my schooling process in a private Catholic school had in my life and my educational practice.

_Educating la nena_

_El primer día de clases_60

The smell of disinfectant fills the air. The school janitor puts an overturned chair back to upright position and begins mopping the floor around it. Parents leave their children at the door where the teacher’s aide meets them and walks them to their assigned seat. The light-skinned, blue eyed lady parents call Miss Felicia is holding a boy on her lap. The boy caused the commotion earlier and is the reason why the janitor is cleaning the classroom. When he momentarily escapes from the teacher’s embrace and runs to the door, Miss Felicia stretches her arms and forces the child back to her lap. The child stares at her in terror. A young woman standing on the right side of the room disapprovingly shakes her head. Then she looks down at the child sitting next to her. A small tear rolls down one of her cheeks.

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60 The first day of school.
I look up at my mother and ask her “Mami, are you ok? Why are you crying?” She wipes the tear and says “It’s nothing dear, it’s just that….I… I’m so happy for you baby”. She looks around her and says “Today a new life begins for you! You have no idea of how lucky you are….this school is one of the best schools in Puerto Rico.”

“Yes, I know”. You have told me plenty of times I think to myself.

At that exact moment, Miss Felicia’s voice interrupts my thoughts. “Well parents, is time for you to leave. According to school policy no parents are allowed on school grounds during instructional time. So, please move along” she says as parents in the room walk to the door and she takes the boy off her lap and walks him to his assigned seat.

My mother hugs me and kisses my forehead while the now endless tears stream down her face. When one of her tears touches my forehead, I feel that is my responsibility to reassure her that everything is going to be fine, so I look up at her and tell her: “don’t worry mami, it’ll be alright”.

“Are you sure?” she puts her left hand under my chin and lifts my face to so she can look at me in the eyes.

“Yes, ma’, I’m sure…just leave”, I said as I smiled at her. A look of relief fills her face as she caresses my cheek with her hand and says “ok, mi amor, Dios te bendiga 61. She turns and walks away from me. I stare at the door and practice a smile because I know she will look at me again.

Just as I expected, once she reaches the door, she turns around and looks at me, so I flash my best smile to her. Her entire face lightens up as she wipes the tears from her face and blows me a kiss and whispers: “I love you!”

My sense of relief is immediately replaced by discomfort as Miss Felicia blocks mami from my view. Miss Felicia steps outside of the room, looks both ways and waits there for about a minute. Then she grabs the door handle and BOOM!!!! She slams the door so loud that the entire classroom shakes and all of us jump up in our seats. Twenty terrorized faces stare at the blue-eyed lady in complete silence. After what seems like forever, she speaks:

My name is Miss Felicia and I’ll be your teacher this year. You will not speak, unless spoken to and you will remain in your seats at all times. If you need to use the restroom, you will raise your hand and ask for my permission. I will decide whether you can go or not. This rule is essential for your survival in this classroom” She said something else I cannot recall because I was too busy trying control the twisting in my stomach and the uncontrollable shaking while I thought mom was right! My life is going to change…but not in the way we imagined.

As this vignette shows, nothing was farther from the truth. My first encounter with one of my so called great teachers was rather disappointing as it was scary. The moment that the teacher slammed the classroom door, school became jail and teachers my jailers. The image I had of teachers as loving caretakers and beacons of light was destroyed at that moment. Right then and there I knew that my school experience was going to be a very hard and that I was going to go through this experience all by myself. Inside the classroom, my teachers were more

61 My love, God bless you.
focused on keeping us quiet, attentive to the material they were teaching, rather than on getting to know us or listening to what we had to say. At that moment in my life, I experienced first hand Freire’s banking model of education as I became a silent recipient of knowledge instead of an active participant in my own education.

Outside the classroom, I felt out of place since I spent entire days in complete silence surrounded by classmates who were in their majority the children of doctors, lawyers, politicians and others members of society to whom I felt no personal connection whatsoever. The only common trait we shared was enduring the domesticating education given by our “great” teachers. There were times when we would not hear a sound during the entire day since we spent entire periods transferring into our notebooks all the notes written on the three-four boards before us. Notes we were expected to memorize to be tested later on. The only time we heard noise was if somebody dared to ask for permission to use the restroom. Needless to say, after seeing how annoyed teachers would get by interruptions, there were few of us who even dared to ask. In this place, every day was the same, and we even looked the same with our little uniforms. Like little soldiers, we prayed in the morning and after that, we would listen, write and repeat back everything we were “taught” by our teachers. During class time, we were not allowed to speak unless we were spoken to and we always had to ask for permission before doing so. In addition, since we were constantly reminded that by wearing the school uniform, we embodied the spirit of our school, we had to be in our best behavior at all times because God was always watching.

As this example shows my education at this private Catholic school was a colonizing experience. According to Freire (1985), one of the church roles is to colonize people. In my particular case, this began to manifest early on in my life, as my grandmother and other women in my life taught me to embrace religion and the church as my means to deal with my future as a
Puerto Rican woman. Besides my teachings at home, my schooling at a Catholic school reinforced the notion that as a Catholic woman my future had to be full of silence, heartache and suffering. Further elaborating on the colonizing role of the church, Freire (1985) notes:

The traditionalist church, first of all, is still intensely colonialist. It is a missionary church, in the worst sense of the word—a necrophiliac winner of souls; hence its taste for masochistic emphasis on sin, hellfire, and eternal damnation. The mundane, dichotomized from the transcendental, is the “filth” in which humans have to pay for their sins. The more they suffer, the more they purify themselves, finally reaching heaven and eternal rest. Work is not, for them, the action of men and women on the world, transforming and recreating, but rather the price that must be paid for being human (p. 131).

As Freire suggests, traditional churches support a series of beliefs that when embraced, serve as a very effective tool for colonizing individuals. As I have presented in the previous chapter, religion played a very important role in my internal colonization as I learned to embrace a set of beliefs that contributed to my understandings of silence which equaled silence to respect and obedience. In this view, one had to remain silent and should not question the divine plan that was designed by an all powerful, all knowing father [God] who was ready to punish me if I dare to do disobey him or his church. I realize now that religion served as a very powerful colonizing tool through which my sense of independence was suppressed and taught me to conform to unjust conditions. Looking back, I come to terms with the idea that I spent most of my life trying to fulfill my expected role as a Catholic “good” woman as I kept silent and conformed to my conditions rather than to try to pursue my own happiness.

In addition, since my Catholic schooling experience followed a banking model of education where no critical thinking was encouraged, I developed a very limited view of teaching. Schooling experiences should give students the opportunity to question the knowledge that they are being given since this allows them to better understand the world around them.
Schooling experiences should also make students feel that they are being perceived as human beings whose backgrounds and experiences matter because when they are not, education then serves as a constricting force rather than a liberating one. As Freire (1970) further explains:

Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women are historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take people’s stories as their starting point (p. 65).

As it can be seen in the examples presented above, my schooling experience did not prepare me to become a critical thinker as I grew accustomed to being a passive learner who just received the learning given by my teachers instead of providing me with the opportunity of questioning the knowledge I was being given.

Furthermore, my schooling experience illustrates how schools serve as social sites where everyday interactions reflect interactions that take place in society at large. As a member of a working-class family, I always felt out of place and could not relate to my classmates from a higher social class. Just like members of subordinate groups in society, I was able to experience the isolation and marginalization that they experience in their everyday lives. Still, as oppressive as this schooling experience might have seemed I always found ways to endure and adapt to my constraining environments. During school time, this happened during recess. This was one of the few times when we had the opportunity to behave like children as we were allowed to play, run and act like normal kids. However, I spent most of this time by myself on a bench watching other kids play while I ate my lunch or played by myself. It is only now that I acknowledge how out of place I felt in that school. I had no close friends there and was very unhappy so I chose to remain silent and not tell my family because I knew how much they were sacrificing to pay for my tuition. There were a couple of times when I put all my effort to try to fit in with my
classmates, but after a few unsuccessful attempts, I traded friends and language for books and silence at school.

As time passed, I adapted to not having close friends at school and eventually this did not bother me at all. In the meantime, I created my own “alternate universe” around family, neighbors and neighborhood friends to whom I presented a different persona from the one I presented at school. In my family environment, I was eloquent, vivacious and quite a leader while in school I was silent, respectful and always followed somebody else’s lead. Looking back, I wonder whether I still follow this practice at both my home and social spaces. From a very early age, I learned that depending on the location, I was expected to act in a certain way. For me, life became more bearable after I figured out the behavior that was expected of me. I taught myself how to become an observer and once I managed to decipher what was expected of me, I then proceeded to “act” the part. Just like I had learned to be a “good” girl at home through my interactions with women around me and through the models that I saw in *telenovelas*, I became someone who could “act” the part she was given. Back then, I was able to play the part of the quiet recipient of knowledge, *la buena estudiante*\(^\text{62}\) that my teachers expected and also the part of *nena buena* that my parents expected me to be. To my parents, being a *nena buena* meant having good grades, being respectful of my elders, and wanting to achieve the “American” dream. Since for them, this meant becoming a doctor or a lawyer, I tried not to let them down. For this reason, when I was home playing around the neighborhood, I always played the leader—the teacher, the lawyer or the doctor—so if seen by my parents they would feel pleased to see that their financial investment was paying off. I was making my family be very proud of me because for me, being a *nena buena*\(^\text{63}\) was all that mattered. In school it was quite the contrary, over there I became *una*

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\(^{62}\) A good student  
\(^{63}\) A good girl
buena estudiante by remaining quiet and respectful and focused on my school work while in school. Even when at times I felt out of place and lonely I got to be very good at disimular⁶⁴ and would adapt my behavior depending on my surroundings. By the time I reached middle school, I had mastered how to comfortably move between my family space and my school space without anyone noticing how uncomfortable and lonely I felt most of the time.

When I became an adolescent, I had already taught myself how to make the best out of a bad situation which at the time translated to focusing in my studies while remaining silent and submissive. To me, silence was a symbol of respect to my elders, family and teachers. Therefore, when confronted with uncomfortable situations, I chose to remain silent and tried to focus on finding ways to survive the experience. My schooling experience is a good example of this practice since it shows how in spite of all the pain and suffering I was going through at the time I remained silent because I did not want to let my family down. Up until today, my family is certain that my Catholic private school experience has had a profound impact in my life—which is true—because even when it led me to better options in life, the experience was also very constraining. Nonetheless, since my family truly believed that education granted access to better opportunities, the desire to honor and please my family was stronger than voicing my personal needs because at the time, I believed that keeping those thoughts to myself served as a way of showing respect to my family.

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⁶⁴ pretending
Listening to the abuelos: “Catholic education will open the doors of opportunity for you”

My maternal abuelos Julia y Alfredo

My own family’s encounters with education had a lot to do with my decision of remaining quiet while going through my schooling in that institution. For example, my maternal abuela\textsuperscript{65} deeply valued education because she had to drop out of school right after completing second grade. She did so because she had to take care of her younger sisters while her mother supported the household. Later on, she relied on her “domestic” skills as well as on her reading and writing skills to be promoted from being a school cafeteria cook to business woman as she used her life savings [since she started working when she was 15] to start her own business\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{65} grandmother

\textsuperscript{66} She rented a house with 6 rooms which she transformed into a boarding house for university students.
before she married my grandfather. *Abuelo* on the other hand, barely had time to finish the eighth grade since both his parents died in less than a six month period leaving him in charge of his younger siblings. Like my grandmother, my *abuelo* was able to secure a job in a local factory thanks to his reading and writing abilities. Given that my grandmother’s business consisted of giving food and board to college students at their home, my grandparents witnessed first hand the difference that education made in these students’ lives. That along with their own personal struggles while going through life with their limited education convinced them that having a complete education gave people access to better opportunities. For this reason, they made it their priority to instill this vision on all members of their family. Furthermore, my grandparents’ interactions with their tenants’ parents—doctors, lawyers, engineers and college professors—who had trusted them with their children, had given them a glimpse of the opportunities that their family members could have if they pursued college degrees themselves.

For that reason, after they had their daughters, they pushed them both to pursue college degrees. Part of their dreams came true when my aunt became the first college graduate in our family, and much to my grandparent’s delight, married one of their former tenants, an electrical engineer from a high class family. Needless to say, at that moment, the expectations for my mother became extremely high since my aunt had done very well and the same or better was now expected of my mother. However, life had different plans for my mother since my mother was not able to pursue a college degree, but they were determined that her daughter could. My grandparents were grateful to the public school system that had helped them acquire skills that were helpful throughout their lives yet, they felt that the local public system lacked an effective curriculum that could allow their grandchildren to become college bound students. To them, Catholic private schools presented students with a better education since their curriculums
included religion and emphasized the learning of English. According to Mendez Bernal (1997), the Puerto Rican educational system became socially segregated after the Island became a Commonwealth in 1952 which divided the Island into two school systems—a private Catholic school system for the upper social classes that emphasized the teaching of English and college preparatory programs, and a public school system for the poor and working-class that emphasized vocational education and deemphasized the teaching of English. As working-class devout Catholics, my family approved of a curriculum that emphasized the mastering of English since they viewed knowing English as an essential tool for those interested on a college education. My grandparents were not the only ones to believe that. Members from the upper class also believed this, and since my grandparents were in constant contact with those members of the upper class who rented rooms for their college student children, my parents went on to believe this as well. As Mendez Bernal (1997) further explains:

The mastery of English by this elite sector of the population legitimated the use of the foreign language, one of the central values of American dominant culture, as communication skill synonymous with power. Through a promotion of the dominant class ideology in Catholic schools the colonial system of domination was legitimized, denied the existing unequal social relations, produced common sense that promoted the division of groups and individuals placing them in opposition to each other, and portrayed Puerto Rico’s socially segregated educational reality as something natural and permanent (p. 150).

However, contrary to what Mendez Bernal asserts, my family’s actions illustrate how they refused to conform to the idea that this socially segregated school system was natural and permanent. By enrolling me in this prestigious Catholic school they were trying to promote within the family the idea that a good education could help us move up in the Puerto Rican social class hierarchy.
In retrospect, even though I acknowledge that the choices that were made for me and the experiences that they exposed me to limited some of the alternatives I had in life, they also allowed me to explore options that I would not have had otherwise. Furthermore, even though my schooling experience was silencing, I found that even within that silence, I learned to adapt and survive these experiences. An example of this can be seen in the way I appropriated English and made it my own. My oppressive schooling experience provided me with the opportunity of appropriating English—the language historically used to “Americanize” Puerto Ricans and managed to transform it into a liberating tool that empowered and enabled me to mediate and respond to the limits of my own experiences and structures of domination and constraint (Giroux, 2001).

As I revisit my schooling experience, I come to terms with the realization that though my schooling experience might have not prepared me to be a critical thinker, it did prepare me to become a compassionate teacher. Unlike most of the teachers I had, I treat my students with respect as I try to get to know them better and make an effort to try to understand the reasons why they might struggle in school and in my class. I learned that teachers need to understand the challenges that students face and which might be preventing them from reaching their highest potential. As I dare to get to know my students better, I hope to discover their strengths so I can help them overcome their limitations. For me, the biggest satisfaction is contributing to the improvement of the quality of their lives and nothing makes me happier than seeing them reach their goals against all odds.

A fact that cannot be denied is that becoming bilingual provides more opportunities for people and for that reason, as a Puerto Rican English teacher, I feel compelled to find ways to motivate my students to appropriate and master English so they can empower themselves as they
use the language for their own advantage. This was something that I was not taught directly but is the biggest lesson I gather from my experiences in school. Even if in the process I was led to worship the country that I was taught had come to “save us” from poverty and ignorance, the experience also taught me that as human beings we also have the option of negotiating, adapting and balancing the oppressive situation by finding ways to make the best out of the situation. Looking back at my schooling process makes me become aware of my colonial wound and that of my people. Right now I am only beginning to understand how deep this wound runs and though this wound might heal the scar it leaves behind will remain forever. Therefore, acknowledging its existence is the first step for the healing to begin.

The aim of this chapter was to explore how my colonial wound came to existence within the larger framework of Puerto Rico’s collective colonial wound. According to Pennycook (1998), the colonial background of English teaching have perpetuated understandings of English and the English native speaker as a superior language and teacher which still plays a major role in how English teaching is constructed and practiced around the world. This suggests that in places like in P.R., English native speakers are considered better teachers of the language. To explore whether this notion is true, in the following chapter I describe the politics of teaching English in P.R. and my encounters with the language and its speakers.
Like any other day, the proud Puerto Rican English teacher walks into her classroom confident and smiling at her students. "La mísí" greets them with her flawless accented English: “hello everyone, how are you?” Students are happy to see her and comfortably speak to her in both English and Spanish as they start asking her questions about the homework that was due that day. Suddenly, silence fills the room as the students stare at the person at the door. "La mísí" noticing the change, immediately walks towards the door smiling and greeting her visitor. Students' eyes follow them as they come into the room and Mrs. Eva Luator walks towards a seat in the back of the room.

"La mísí" feels the nervous glances and the awkward silence that still fills the room. "La mísí" knows... she knows that they are tense, just like her ... But, "La mísí" tries to disguise her nervousness as she puts back her confidence mask on, confidence in her teaching skills and her English language abilities. She tells the students not to fear, that the visitor is there to evaluate her, not them and that they should carry on and behave as they do any other day.

As "La mísí" begins her lesson, she hopes her students use more English than Spanish today, as she wants to impress her visitor and to prove that she is a good English teacher.

But regardless of what happens in class, in the eyes of Mrs. Eva Luator, the act of speaking and teaching English with an accent has already condemned "La mísí.

(NanVan, 2007)

The politics of language in P.R.

English have been actively present in the lives of Puerto Ricans since the Island became a U.S. colony in 1898, resulting in close political, military, economic and social ties between the two countries. Right after Puerto Rico was ceded to the U.S., it became clear that the plan that the U.S had was to completely reshape the Island based on the belief that Puerto Ricans were not prepared for independence and were portrayed by U.S. colonial administrators and

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68 Chewing the difficult one. This is a colloquial Puerto Rican expression that refers to the act of speaking English.

69 Spanglish term of endearment used by Puerto Rican students when referring to female English teachers

70 Disguise.
anthropologists of the time as a racially and culturally inferior group when compared to white
*estadounidenses* of Anglo-Saxon origin (Duany, 2002). Hence, the colonial project was set into
motion so the Island could at least become a showcase of democracy in the Caribbean as the new
colonizers hoped to transform Puerto Rico’s impoverished, ignorant, tradition-bound peasants
through education, English literacy, and class mobility (Urcioli, 1998). Moreover, since U.S.
colonial administrators were convinced that Puerto Ricans would not resist “Americanization”
through English in Puerto Rican schools—just like they had not resisted the U.S. military
invasion in 1898—colonial administrators were surprised to encounter resistance to instruction in
English. It seems that U.S. administrators had overlooked that due to Puerto Rico’s long colonial
relationship with Spain, Puerto Rican culture and the variety of Spanish spoken on the Island had
been shaped by the races, cultures and languages that had been in contact for more than four
hundred years. This new hybrid culture had managed to fuse the customs, beliefs, music, art and
words from Spanish, African and *Taíno* Indigenous cultures and peoples. Therefore, when the
Island became a U.S. colony, there was the question of the extent to which this new colonial
relationship with a country composed of people who were protestant, English-speaking, and of
white Anglo-Saxon descent would impact the lives of the Catholic, and racially, culturally,
linguistically mixed Puerto Ricans.

The nature of this colonial relationship has impacted Puerto Ricans in many ways, but
particularly perceptions about Puerto Rico, the U.S., Spanish and English. For example, since the
majority of the population spoke only Spanish, those who spoke English—who were mostly
members of the elite who had been educated in the U.S. and Europe—and had the opportunity of
voicing and negotiating their needs with those in positions of power effectively, it can be said
that English became a symbol of power and status on the Island. For the majority of the people
of the Island, however, it was not easy to voice or negotiate their needs to those who could not understand them. Consequently, the U.S. attempted to impose English on them through the educational system, but found resistance from Puerto Ricans since they refused to completely give up Spanish as their medium of instruction in schools. Puerto Rican schools then became sites of struggle as Puerto Rican students and teachers resisted the attempt to enforce the curriculum via English teaching. After some local teachers were fired for refusing to teach in English or who did not pass the English oral annual test (Pousada, 2000), local teachers organized and founded the Puerto Rican Teacher’s Association\textsuperscript{71}, a politically active organization that defended teachers’ and students’ rights. This organization presented such a strong front to U.S. colonial policies that more than one Commissioners of Education was fired or forced to resign from their position due to the pressure this group presented. Other commissioners attempted to negotiate with the organization, parents and students as they constantly switched language policies back and forth for almost forty years. This ended in 1949, when the first Puerto Rican governor was elected and his first act as governor was to reestablish Spanish as the sole medium of instruction in public schools while English became a subject to be taught from grades K-12. One of the reasons why this happened was because it seemed that for Puerto Ricans, Spanish represented Puerto Rican cultural identity; thus, for the majority of the people, maintaining Spanish as their everyday language became the one symbol of resistance to U.S. imperialism and for some people it remains so today.

In the attempt to understand how English in P.R. has become associated with U.S. colonialism, one should consider the fact that this is not a unique situation. P.R. is not the only place where a colonial language has been imposed. Furthermore, P.R. was not the only U.S.

\textsuperscript{71} For a more detailed account of the emergence of this association, please refer to Pousada, 2000; Duany, 2002; Torres Gonzalez, 2003; and Del Moral, 2006.
colony where English and “Americanization” initiatives were implemented. For example, Guam and the Philippines, which were also ceded to the U.S. by Spain after the war, were imposed the same language policies and colonial initiatives as P.R. but with different outcomes. In Guam, even though English and Chamorro are the official languages, English is still the medium of instruction in schools and the language spoken in public spaces. The Philippines also has two official languages: English and Filipino. Both were the languages of instruction until 1987 when English began to be used only for teaching math and science. When one compares the policies established on the three islands and their outcomes, one can see that the outcomes of the U.S. English language imposition have been different in the three islands. Guamanians successfully shifted to English, Filipinos successfully became bilingual but unlike the people from Guam and Philippines, Puerto Ricans refused to incorporate English to their everyday lives.

A similar situation can be seen in Quebec, Canada where language has also become the center of controversy. There are many similarities between P.R. and Quebec. Both were colonies; Quebec was a French colony and P.R. was a Spanish colony; both were agricultural, Catholic and acquired by an English-speaking colonial power after a war. The difference lies in the fact that the British did not impose English in Quebec but rather allowed Quebecois to keep French as their vernacular. Over the years, Quebecois have successfully maintained their usage of French instead of assimilating to the English speaking population that surrounds them in their country, a choice that they are willing to defend through political action and legislation when necessary. This has been done in order to ensure the maintenance of French as their everyday language. When we compare the case of Quebec to that of P.R., we can see how in both places language has become a symbol of resistance and collective identity. In the case of P.R., however, the issue has become more complicated due to frequent changes in the status of English
as an official language and as a medium of instruction in schools which have led to a competition between Spanish and English. The problem is that in P.R. the lack of consistency in language policies has influenced the perceptions that people have of the languages, thus, presenting a problem for language teachers since it seems that the language that one chooses to speak automatically points out to which country one is aligning to in this competition.

Political parties have played an important role in this competition because each political party has managed to promote each language as a symbol of partisan ideals (Osuna, 1949; Velez, 1995; Pousada, 1996), and a tool to bring affiliates into their political parties (Crespo, 1991). Of the four main political parties on the Island, three of them advocate for possible outcomes of the Island’s unresolved status: statehood, independence and status quo. These political parties are the New Progressive Party (PNP) which supports the idea of statehood; the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) which supports the idea of independence for the Island; and the Popular Democratic Party which supports maintaining the Island’s current Commonwealth (ELA) status. Throughout the years, politicians from these different political parties have created a competition between the two languages which have lead to the safeguarding of Spanish as the language of everyday life, in spite of the official status of English on the Island. No longer a medium of instruction in the public school system, English is currently a required subject from grades K-12. For this reason, learning English in P.R. is mostly perceived by a large number of Puerto Ricans as a hassle since life in P.R. “happens” in Spanish. The language debate had been fairly forgotten until 1991 when political parties decided to once again place the languages against each other as a pro-status quo governor reestablished Spanish as the only official language of the Island. Up until that moment, English had been along with Spanish one of the

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72 This has been so since 1949 when the first Puerto Rican governor elected by the people reestablished Spanish as the only medium of instruction in the public school system.
official languages of the Island. This action caused quite a commotion among pro-statehood supporters since they considered the act as an insult to U.S. Congress since it would send the message that Puerto Ricans would never give up their Spanish language to embrace statehood. According to Velez and Schweers (1993) the main reason for making Spanish the only official language in 1991 was to make statehood look like the less feasible political status for the Island, since at that time the political power was assigned to one of the political parties that was opposed to statehood but favored the status quo. Three years later, the response of the newly elected pro-statehood governor was to immediately reestablish the status of English as the other official language of the Island and to announce the implementation of a public educational reform called the Project for Developing a Bilingual Citizen (1997) to once again send U.S. Congress the message that Puerto Ricans were getting ready for statehood.

It must be noted that this project focused on allowing more instructional time to both English and Spanish class, but also by making math and science teachers teach these subjects in English while the rest of the subjects—social studies, Spanish, health, art and music would be still be taught in Spanish. In addition, the project presented the 10,000 English teachers who were teaching at the public level without teaching certifications with an opportunity to attain their elementary English teaching certifications. At that moment that the project was developed only two universities on the Island [out of thirty] prepared English elementary teachers who authors of the project considered were crucial for the success of the project (Project for Developing a Bilingual Citizen, 1997, p. 5). Needless to say, teacher associations considered this project to be biased and refused to enforce it in their classrooms since those behind its creation and implementation were supporters of statehood. Some of the arguments that these teachers supported were that a great majority of math and science the teachers did not master English and
that for that reason students would struggle more in these classes if taught in English since some of the concepts were already difficult enough when taught in Spanish and that by teaching them in English this would confuse the students even more. This argument was not new to Puerto Ricans since this was one of the prevailing arguments that local teachers defended during the first forty years of the U.S. occupation and which led to the frequent changes in educational policies at the time. This controversy during the 1990’s is an example of yet another attempt from politicians to fuel the animosity between the two languages rather than find ways to show Puerto Ricans how the two languages could co-exist and the advantages and opportunities that bilingualism would present for Puerto Ricans. Unfortunately, these have been the events that have linked the language issue to the Island’s unresolved political status.

An example of this can be seen in the results of a referendum conducted during the 1990’s which was supported by the pro-statehood party to demonstrate to the U.S. Congress that Puerto Ricans were ready to become a U.S. state. However, these results proved to be rather disappointing for the prostatehood party since an overwhelmingly high percentage of the population chose to vote for option number four73 which was none of the above. Some people attribute this result to the campaign sponsored by both the pro-independence and pro-status quo parties which exhorted the people to vote for option four as a way to protect Spanish as our vernacular language because if the statehood option won the Island would be paving the way to become a state and since the U.S. would not allow a Spanish-speaking state, Puerto Ricans would forced to become English speakers. So in a way, referendum results suggest that Puerto Ricans are willing to take extreme measures in order to keep Spanish as our vernacular.

According to Zentella (1990), one of the explanations for the language-identity controversy in P.R. has to do with Puerto Ricans perceiving language change/loss as an equivalent for cultural

73 The other three options were statehood, independence and status quo.
loss. As she compared Puerto Ricans’ perceptions of bilingualism on and off the Island, she reported that Puerto Ricans on the Island saw bilingualism as a symbol of assimilation rather than as a link to the outside world. This fear of losing their language and culture could be influencing Puerto Ricans the most when it comes to perceptions of English and reasons for English teaching and learning.

The examples presented above suggest that English presence in P.R. has become associated with U.S. power on the Island and even though the enforcing of colonial initiatives ended once the Island acquired Commonwealth status it seems that most Puerto Ricans living on the Island still believe that English and Spanish are symbolic markers (Morris, 1996) of each culture. Furthermore, because politicians and their actions have promoted Spanish as a marker of Puerto Rican identity, the language issue has been linked to the Island’s unresolved political status. Some believe that when the Island’s status is decided the language controversy will be solved as well. These binary placing of English and Spanish has definitively played an important part in the way those responsible to teach the English are perceived and in the ways in which English is taught on the Island.

One theorist who connects colonialism to English and English teaching is Phillipson (1992), who argues that the 1961 ESL Commonwealth Conference in Uganda74 served to reinforce many of the assumptions that still inform English teaching practices today. One of these assumptions is the notion that English native speakers are better models of teachers than English non-native speakers with full mastering of the language. This is what is known as the “native speaker myth”. Nevertheless, he considers this to be a hegemonic belief, and acknowledges that it is only hegemonic when it upholds the values of dominant groups. For this reason, he recommends that English linguistic imperialism be analyzed within the context of

74 This conference brought together a group of 23 representatives from countries that had ELT needs.
hegemony, with its reproduction under continuous contestation and with its own internal contradictions, which when recognized will help open the possibility of change within the field. The fact that English was used as a colonial/hegemonic tool in P.R. must be acknowledged by Puerto Rican English teachers as we face challenges in our classrooms that are not only rooted in linguistic aspects of language learning, but also in our colonial relationship to the U.S. This is an aspect that inevitably plays a major influence in the way English is learned and taught in P.R.

With this in mind, in the following section, I proceed to describe my own encounters with English and how these encounters shaped my perceptions of English, and of myself as a Puerto Rican English speaker and teacher. This is an important aspect to examine in this journey to colonial experience, since regardless of the status or controversies surrounding English on the Island and the perceptions and attitudes that Puerto Ricans have of English, I am one of those teachers responsible for teaching English to Puerto Rican students. Therefore, my perceptions of the language and of my role as an English teacher are going to impact the type of English teacher that I am.
As far as I can remember, my father was a very important person in my life. He always encouraged me to learn everything I could, but above all, he wanted me to learn English because for him, English was the language of progress. Although I grew up speaking Spanish with my family, I became bilingual through my father and formal schooling. My father grew up in New York City so he always spoke to me in English. I clearly remember him telling me that English was the key to my future and because I was becoming bilingual the doors of opportunity would open for me. He took every opportunity to encourage me to learn English and since at times I found it boring, he would rely on popular culture to make it fun for me to learn.

Once again, popular culture was used to reinforce values, beliefs, notions about gender roles and assumptions about U.S. and English that my family and teachers supported. Just like my abuela did with telenovelas with me, my father used popular culture to reinforce the hegemonic ideas regarding English and its speakers that he had. For example, while growing up,
my father would not allow for me to listen to U.S. programming dubbed to Spanish\textsuperscript{76}. He thought that it was insulting that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens, and still most of them could not understand English. For that reason, he did not want his children to be like those around us. For that reason, every time I was about to watch my favorite shows, my father would look for our radio and tune it into the AM station that aired the original English broadcast and he would lower the volume on our TV, so I had no choice except to listen to the entire program in English. Even though it was a little hard at first, as time passed I got used to listening to the programs in English. After a few years, I would not have them any other way because one thing that I accomplished by this was that I was now able to understand spoken English. Thanks to this routine, I developed an interest in expanding my English vocabulary so I could understand better. When I didn’t understand a word I would look for it in the dictionary. I even had a personal dictionary where I wrote all the expressions or phrases I didn’t understand, so I could ask my dad or my English teachers for clarification later on.

My father was also responsible for my interest in reading in English. As long as it was in English my father would buy me any book or magazine that I wanted. I got so interested in reading U.S. magazines and tabloids that there were times when I was more aware about what was happening in the U.S. than what was happening in my own country. Through my readings I got to identify with the English speaking culture that I admired so much and which I judged based on what was presented to me by the media. As time passed and I got more interested in learning more English, by the time I reached middle school, I was very proud of my English language skills which I began to show off at school as a way to survive my very oppressive school existence. In school, I survived my elementary school years, thanks to the English teachers who continuously privileged me for having a good command of English. It was because

\textsuperscript{76} At the time there was no cable TV and the local channels transmitted U.S. serials dubbed in Spanish.
of these teachers that I didn’t cave in and told my parents how unhappy and out of place that I felt in school. Since I felt very grateful to my father and my teachers for giving me the gift of English, I focused on making them feel proud of me. Through observations, my interactions with those English teachers who believed in me and the reinforcement that I had at home with my father, I started to believe that even though I did not belong in that school, being a better English speaker than many of my classmates would take me further in life.

From then on, I considered myself better than many of my classmates, family, and friends who could not speak “good English”. By the time I entered middle school I noticed that I was starting to be perceived by some family and friends as someone who was superior because I could speak both Spanish and English fluently and they couldn’t. Those were the moments when I first started to feel empowered by my role as a translator/mediator between family, classmates and friends, and other English speakers. The following vignette illustrates how I felt empowered by the English language at age 10 when I first visited the U.S. with my grandparents:

As we sit on the shuttle to connect us to our next flight, I can tell my grandparents are really impressed with my English skills, I can see it in their faces; they look at me differently. They are both impressed and proud. I am so good…I didn’t hesitate for a second, I went straight to the flight attendant and asked her where I could connect to our other flight. The flight attendant asked me if I wanted to get a translator for my grandparents and I said no, that I would do it myself. Then I asked them to follow me and they did without hesitating!! They completely trusted me!!
I followed the monitors, asked questions at the airline counter and thanks to me, we will be there on time to take the flight to Titi’s house. This is all happening because of me!!! Thanks to my great English skills....My grandparents were lucky I was here to save the day.

At such an early age I realized that knowing English and serving as a translator or mediator gave me “power” over other people. After that experience, I officially became la gringa de la familia, the family’s mediator and translator when they had to write letters and make phone calls to the U.S. I felt due to my English speaking abilities that I also started to speak English with my father and those classmates who did too so people would hear I was an English speaker. English even became the code my brother and I used around adults and friends in the neighborhood when we did not want them to understand what we were saying. We felt that English gave us power, and because we spoke it, we seemed to be perceived superior by other Puerto Ricans. This was a belief that was reinforced by my positive experiences with English speakers with whom I chose to align myself in order to distance myself from my Puerto Rican culture which at the time I considered to be inferior. English colonial discourses combined with popular culture fostered in me assumptions about my own culture which were reinforced by a schooling system that promoted U.S. superiority over Puerto Rican inferiority (Walsh, 1991).

However, the more I distanced myself more from Spanish and Puerto Rican culture, the more my interest on becoming a translator grew. This interest began to emerge during my adolescence when I began translating movies to my family and friends at home. Following my parents’ divorce, my father felt guilty for not being able to reinforce my use of English at home, so he did what he thought was the next best thing: he gave me a VCR as my quinceañera gift. After that moment, I made my father proud as I impressed family and friends with my translating
skills. Every weekend when friends and family visited, I would play a movie on the VCR and if anyone sat with me, I would start translating if it was possible word by word but during those moments when people spoke too fast, I would stop the movie to summarize what the characters had just said, so everyone could understand and enjoy the movie. The more I did this, the more family and friends suggested that I had a gift and that I should consider becoming either a translator or an English teacher later in life.

When I began twelfth grade my U.S. English teacher encouraged these ideas further as she decided to make me her “assistant”. She told me that I had earned it because I had shown interest in “American” literature, but most of all because unlike most of my classmates, I wasn’t afraid of speaking English in public. She allowed me to grade quizzes and exams and serve as a tutor of classmates because she got really frustrated at times because she didn’t know Spanish and felt she was unable to help them. I took advantage of the opportunity because for the first time I felt really empowered within my school environment as classmates who had completely ignored me during our elementary school experience and were in the more advanced groups [we were divided by GPA in our classrooms] would come to me for help because most of them were afraid to ask our teacher. Although at times this was exhausting, I felt useful as I helped my teacher with her work, and at the same time felt comfortable serving as a mediator between my culture and that of our teacher’s. I had now become friends with everybody in my grade since I was perceived differently due to my English skills. I found the experience useful because the idea of becoming a translator made me dream of a future working in the U.S. Either on television or in the United Nations. All my life, all I could think of was how to find a way to move away from my family and my culture which I felt limited me. At that moment, I put all of

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77 I use the term American in quotation marks because when referring to America, I am referring to the whole continent and not just the United States.
my effort in my studies so I could eventually move to the U.S. so I could live surrounded by the people I admired and wanted to be like.
Becoming an English teacher

My first year teaching opportunity, 1994

I never planned on becoming a teacher. It happened by accident. All my life, all I dreamed about was working on television or as a translator, unbeknownst to me, my parents had hoped for me to settle for having a degree from our local university where they both worked as staff assistants. They wanted me to attend our local university because I was going to be able to get a free college education due to their employee discount. The problem was that I wanted to study a major that was not offered at our local campus. As I tried to explain to my parents the reason why I had not applied to “their” university, they argued that even though they understood my situation, there was no other way around it because due to their financial situation, it would have been impossible for my parents—already divorced and remarried to other people—to support three households. So as always, I kept quiet as I postponed my dream. Once more, I kept silent, accepted my destiny and settled for being la nena buena by making my parents happy. So I agreed to attend the university in my hometown. My mother found a way for me to get late admission to the university as she promised to use her “connections” at the university so I could switch majors and be able to study something that was closer to my interests.
After I finished my second year, I was able to change to the English Department because it was the only subject that I really liked and felt was closer to my professional interests. I chose the literature track within my department because I was not planning on working as a teacher. I wanted to be a translator or a journalist. However, I did take all the basic courses required for the teaching certification except for the methodology and field experience ones. By the time I graduated and was unable to find a job as a translator or journalist right away, my family suggested that I try applying for a teaching job since the Department of Education was in desperate need of teachers and was not even requiring the formal teaching certification. Once again, the “good” girl followed her parents’ advice and that is how my teaching career began.

As a beginning teacher, I feel now that I was a very presumptuous and naïve as I expected my students to find English, the grammar and the literature interesting. The more I tried to impose my “love” for English and U.S. literature and culture, the more resistance I found around me. I still remember a fourth grader telling me: “Maestra, pa’que voy yo a aprender ingle si ni mi pai ni mi mai lo entienden, no me pueden ayudar en las asignaciones, y para colmo somos independentistas.” I was horrified by comments like these and felt that I needed to change those attitudes in any way I could. Looking back, I now realize that my student’s refusal to use English in the classroom illustrates some of the gaps present in the imposition of the colonizer’s values. My student’s refusal to learn English shows me that even within the most constricting conditions the colonized always have the power to resist colonial or oppressive experiences. Students like him, also showed me that students need to relate to what they are learning because if they don’t see a connection between what they are learning and its application in their lives, students tend to back away from these learning experiences. Back then,

78 Teacher, why should I learn English if neither my father or my mother understands it, they can’t help me with the homework and to make matters worse we are independentistas (pro-independence for Puerto Rico).
my response to this attitude was to enforce my own “English empowers me” worldview as I tried to provide my students with what I felt was a tool that would get them access to a better life. I began to do this by incorporating my father’s technique of teaching English through popular culture. This technique helped me make the content of the class interesting to my students as I relied on the strategies that helped me with my English skills as I tried to make learning English fun to my students by connecting the material that I presented to them to their lives.

For seven years I felt very proud of teaching English in Puerto Rican schools. In every public school I worked in, I was always the coordinator of the English club, the Shakespeare Club and other organizations that encouraged English usage. I took the time to do this because I felt that the students deserved it. I did this because for me, these students deserved to go through the same experiences I had experienced as a student in a private school. Although there were always associations and clubs in the schools where I worked, the grade point average (GPA) requirements needed to be considered for membership in these clubs were unfair to most of the students. What I could not understand was why if a student was not good at one subject, s/he would be denied a chance to join a group that they wanted to belong to even when they had the potential to excel. For this reason, even when I knew that many students did not like English, I was able to negotiate with my superiors that the GPA required for admission to students’ clubs be replaced with the applicants’ commitment to improving their English skills instead. My colleagues praised me for this initiative because they noticed that by bending the rules a little I was allowing my students to have the same opportunities as other students who were considered to be “better” due to their GPAs and this was making a difference in students’ performance in all of their other subjects. Many students who were considered lost causes and problematic were now improving their grades on other classes because other teachers began to imitate what I was
doing with the English club. My supervisors and colleagues kept encouraging me to get my teaching certification because they thought that I had a lot to offer our students.

My experiences teaching English in Puerto Rican schools along with the desire of improving the way English was taught led me to apply to a Master’s Program back in the same university where I did my undergraduate degree. After a year into my Master’s program, I became interested on researching the reasons why students resisted learning English because I wanted to know how to “correct” these attitudes in order to improve the way English was taught in public schools. It was during this experience that I had the opportunity of becoming a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Since unlike most of my classmates I had a teaching experience, I was assigned to teach two or three Basic English undergraduate courses each semester. By teaching at the university level, I encountered many of the same challenges and situations I had encountered in schools, but had the advantage that I now had more freedom which allowed me to put into practice some ideas I had developed from my own learning experiences. Also, since I was dealing now with young adults, I didn’t have to deal with parents who might challenge my practices or material I chose for my classes, made it easier for me to combine the material I was required to cover, with some of my own popular culture related material while connecting these to my students’ lives.

As an English teacher, I did the best I could do as I tried to teach the language that I always saw as the instrument that gave me access into a “superior” culture. At times, I would feel really upset by the contradictory feelings I experienced when students refused to use English since I saw that as an act of denying themselves opportunities for advancing in the world. For that reason, I not only incorporated movies, music and comic books to my teaching repertoire but also gave students enough freedom in my class, so they would feel safe in my classroom where
we could talk about anything. I also decided to become the “cool” teacher who kept up with trends in fashion, music and movies as my means to connect to my students so I could lure them into discovering the uses that English had in their lives. As I completed my Master’s Degree and a few years teaching, I felt I was doing an excellent job teaching a language that was not my first language. Nevertheless, this belief would completely be shaken after I was ranked last on a list of English teachers who were considered for a job position at the university level.

**El ranking: a turning point**

The vignette La Misí at the beginning of the chapter was inspired by true events. As the vignette illustrates, la Misí shared more than the expected skills and knowledge with her students as she also shared the fears, beliefs and silences that just like them, she had been socialized into. However, as a Spanish native speaker, I always thought I was doing an excellent job teaching a language that was not my first language. Yet, that sense of pride and accomplishment was shaken after I learned that I was ranked last on a list of candidates being considered for a renewal of contract in the institution that I worked for. This experience made me question my teaching skills and my English skills as well. In the final report I came across as a flawed teacher who should be rehired “only if” my services were required. Of all the teachers ranked on the list, I appeared to be the one with the least possibilities to be considered for a tenure track position due to my lack of “potential to succeed in a doctoral program” and my “lack of enthusiasm in the classroom”. Although hallway gossip attributed this ranking to different reasons, the reason that affected me the most was the possibility that I was not considered a good candidate because I was a Puerto Rican English non-native speaker. Regardless if this was true or not, this assessment of my qualifications made me feel very uncomfortable because I always felt that I
was an enthusiastic and motivated teacher whose English skills and pronunciation was very good. The sole idea that my senior colleagues [mostly U.S. English native speakers] could consider me less based on my “accent” completely infuriated me. I always thought that being a Puerto Rican English teacher was my biggest asset since I had gone through the experience of learning a second language and had appropriated the language for my own benefit. I felt that as a member of the culture I knew better than others what my students wanted and needed. In addition, I could not understand how my not being an English native speaker could lead to such a harsh assessment of my teaching skills and abilities. Most of the time, my teaching evaluations were higher than those of colleagues who had more teaching experience than I did. Could the hallway gossip be right? Was I a “bad” teacher? I tried to recall all of the evaluations by colleagues or superiors in the past and could not recall any negative evaluation. What was different this time? Could it be that I seemed too nervous during this specific evaluation? Or was it my students’ lack of English usage during class what made me look like an ineffective teacher? I imagine that these were some of the insecurities that English non-native teachers like those interviewed by Tang (1997) and Amin (1997) felt as their confidence and teaching practice were affected by their self-perceptions as English teachers.

What really bothered me was that I appeared to have some tragic flaw that was preventing me from being considered a good model of an English teacher. What could it be? Most of the evaluating members had been my professors and/or mentors to me, people who I admired and emulated in my classroom, people who I thought believed in me and my potential. This ranking experience dealt a mortal blow to my self-esteem since who I thought I was and what I represented in my classroom was destroyed in a matter of seconds. If it was true that they thought I was not a good model of English teacher for being Puerto Rican, why was I hired in the
first place? This experience really shook me to the core. After the anger, pain settled in; I felt really hurt because I always thought that my former teachers had validated my assimilation into their culture and considered me a colleague, but after this experience, I was left wondering if I had just been hit in the face by the master’s whip. In a matter of seconds I went from being—in my opinion—la gringa de la familia to the Boricua\textsuperscript{79} teacher with no potential and an accent. Whether the hallway gossip had been true or not, for me, the experience made me feel I had been put down to place\textsuperscript{80} by real gringos and not the gringo wannabe I now felt I was.

This was one of the first moments when Puerto Rican colonial mentality caught up with me. All of my life, I had embraced a language and a culture that was not my own in order to disappear in that culture (Memmi, 1965), I had just realized that no matter how hard I tried, I would never be one of “them”. This experience called for a complete reevaluation of my life, my goals and my teaching practice. Of one thing I was sure, I would never be the same person that I had been before the ranking experience. Something was brewing within my soul, something that was pushing me to question and challenge everything I had come to believe. It was at this moment when I decided to completely engage in transforming my classroom in “spaces of possibility” (Simon (1987) as I was determined to provide my students with more freedom than I was given while in school so my students could appropriate forms of knowledge that would help them succeed in their future lives.

In the following section I describe the teaching approach I decided to adopt the semester after the “ranking evaluation”.

\textsuperscript{79} Indigenous name of Puerto Ricans.

\textsuperscript{80} Since this former teacher was a “native speaker” of English and made me feel inferior to her.
**Teaching literature in English Boricua style**

Three months after the ranking I rehired in the same place where I had been ranked and was assigned to teach four writing about literature courses. Since I was still shaken by the ranking experience and was questioning everything around me and this new found questioning stance included my professional life, I decided to change the approach I had previously used to teach this class. For this class, I had always focused on covering the assigned reading material and strictly following the reading list that was given to us by the course coordinator. However, this semester was different from the previous ones not only because of the ranking but also because it was my last year teaching in this institution. Motivated by my ranking experience and the questioning of my skills, I had applied to a Ph.D. program and got accepted, so by the end of that school year I was relocating with my children in the U.S. Therefore, this year I was determined to shake things up and challenge the curriculum for the first time in my life. The main goal of the course was for students to read, react, analyze and write about works of literature. The literature to be covered during the semester included most of the canonical readings included in any introduction to literature course in the U.S. By the end of the semester, students were expected to write a five hundred word essay about one of these canonical readings. During that exam, students selected one question from a choice of five and would go through all the writing process\(^{81}\) in a period of two hours. As I reviewed the syllabus and materials previously used for this class, I wondered if the textbook and the goals of the course were appropriate for our English as a second language, second year university students.

In order to understand why I was speculating about this, we must first look at the background of the students who register in these courses. The university I was teaching in has an

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\(^{81}\) Pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing
average of 12,000 undergraduate students pursuing degrees in agriculture, engineering, arts, business and sciences. All students are required to take twelve credits in English for graduation. The English Department works mostly as a service department that offers three English track options for freshmen students based on their scores on the ESLAT\(^8\) as well as offering courses for its English majors. The three English sequence options that serve the entire freshmen community are Basic English, Intermediate English or Advanced English.

The sequence of courses in which students will take these twelve credits depends on their scores on the ESLAT which is worth 800 points. The course sequences are organized as follows:

- Students who score 469 and less are placed in Pre-basic English which is a non-credit remedial course for which they take an exit examination that when approved, will allow them to continue to the Basic English 101 & 102 track for their first year followed by a English Composition and Reading 201-202 in their second year.

- Students who score between 470 and 569 are placed directly in the Basic101-102 sequence for their first year followed by 201-202 for their second year.

- Students who score between 570 and 800 are placed in the Intermediate English 103-104 for their first year and have the option of taking any elective within the department as long as it is in the 300 or 400 level.

- Students who score a 4 or 5 on the advanced placement examination [these are students who have taken advanced English in twelfth grade] are placed in Advanced English and are not required to take any other English class because they come into the university with six English credits already approved.

Freshmen students who enter the university are in their majority Puerto Rican or of Puerto Rican descent with the highest GPA’s from both private and public schools of the Island. In the

\(^8\) Second language achievement test
academic year 2002-2003 which is the academic year when I taught the course, there were 2,078 new students from which 1,224 came from public schools and 854 from private schools. At the time, the average number of students per group fluctuated between 15 and 26 students per class.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, after one hundred and eight years of colonial contact with the U.S. and of formal instruction of English in schools and English is still considered by many Puerto Ricans as a subject that is considered by those with limited proficiency as *el cuco o el difícil*84. Although Puerto Rican students take English classes throughout their K-12 schooling experience, many of them reach and leave the university with very limited proficiency. According to Pousada (2003), the existing English curriculum at the university level works well with students whose skills are well developed but not with those who have limited competency due to the deficiencies that they bring from inconsistent English classroom experiences and teachers’ practices. Based on this, I was determined to offer my students a class where they could improve their English reading and writing skills while feeling comfortable enough to voice and discuss their needs. Some of these needs I could anticipate based on my past experiences teaching the class.

The first need that I wanted to address was related to class materials. In the past, even when I had wondered about the reasons why we had adopted this huge anthology as a textbook for the course, I did not voice or take any action in my course committee meetings to share these concerns with my colleagues. While planning my new class, the more I examined the anthology the more inappropriate that I found it for our second language (ESL) students since this textbook had been developed for English native speakers. At that time, I felt that it was my obligation to

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84 The boogie-man or the difficult one.
provide my students with materials that were appropriate to their level of proficiency in the language. Santiago (2008) argues that ESL teachers should identify and use literature that is both enjoyable and thought-provoking since this will allow Puerto Rican students not only to become competent English users, but critical thinkers as well. However, in my previous teaching experiences, I had always chosen to follow the reading list given to us, which limited students to read literature canon which had been written many years ago mostly by U.S. white writers—who wrote about “universal” themes—but whose writing was mostly about events and experiences to which our students felt no connection at all. I decided to balance this by including literature from sources that were overlooked in the anthology: feminists, African-Americans, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican writers. I decided to combine the required classic short stories from the anthology with units on Angela Carter, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Langston Hughes, Derek Walcott, Sandra Cisneros, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Esmeralda Santiago to make students relate to the readings by these writers since they wrote about gender, race, language and class issues.

Another need that I wanted to address was one related to the financial concerns of students. In previous years students had complained about the anthology’s high price. Although most of our students had financial aid which would help them cover their course materials, our anthology’s price was so high that at times, it exceeded the price of the books that those required for the student’s majors. Just like them, there were times when I could not understand why we would make our students buy a book that was not going to be completely covered during just one semester. For this reason, I decided to create a course manual which included a compilation of handouts, readings and exercises that would be covered during the semester. In addition, my students were going to read When I was Puerto Rican as the novel required for the course instead
of Hamlet. Once I had selected the materials, there was only one step left to take, asking the head of the department for permission to use this manual instead of the textbook. Once I was granted permission to use the manual, I was very pleased to see that class materials were going to cost my students less than twenty five dollars instead of the eighty dollars that the anthology textbook would cost.

In addition, I was hopeful because I had chosen to teach stories, poems and novels to which I felt a personal connection and which I thought my students could relate to as well. In my years of teaching I noticed that many students did not see the use of reading literature. I was hoping that the materials I chose would help them identify the connections between literature and life. As I reviewed my options on how I would make literature matter for these students from day one, I thought about introducing students to literature by relating it to their previous experiences with short fiction. This was something that a colleague of mine had tried very successfully in her classroom. So I consulted with her and she shared with me some of the handouts and materials that she used in her classes. I adapted some of them for my class. In addition, I went back to the materials I had from a course that I took on models for teaching literature and created several handouts that I added to the manual and which guided students through alternative or informal ways in which students could respond to literature.

During the first week of classes I did the usual activities to introduce the course along with some others that I had never tried before. As I distributed and discussed the syllabus with students, they seemed very relieved to see that their course materials were not going to be as expensive as those of other students taking the same course. After sharing with them some personal information about my learning and teaching experience, I proceeded to request a writing sample which I would use as a diagnostic sample. This time I departed from the typical prompt
of what did you do during your winter holiday and rather asked them to talk about their favorite movie, actor/actress or song, type of music or artist or group and their reasons for liking them. I could read in my students’ faces that this was not the type of prompt that they were expecting. Much to my surprise most of the students not only wrote the required one page but many of them wrote two and even three pages. After class, I read the diagnostic samples and identified common grammatical errors that students did in their writing such as subject-verb agreement, double negatives, and spelling and vocabulary. I prepared a handout with a list of these errors along with a brief explanation of what the error consisted of and gave examples from the prompts. I also gave them suggestions on how these errors could be avoided. During the second day of classes, we discussed these and students found the exercise very useful.

During the following weeks I introduced literary terms and short fiction by reading and discussing fables, parables and fairy tales. Students really enjoyed reading and discussing these pieces of short fiction that they had been exposed to as children. As we revisit these, students were able to identify story elements as well as themes present in these stories. A reading that the students particularly enjoyed was Little Red Riding Hood since I provided them with three different versions of the tale. They first read Perrault’s version followed by the Grimm Brothers’ version. After students compared these two versions of the tale, I asked them to respond by writing another version of the tale and much to my surprise, students got really creative and wrote from politically correct versions of the story to science fiction tales based on the fairy tale. I ended our first unit by reading Angela Carter’s feminist take of Little Red Riding Hood tale titled In the Company of Wolves. Of all the discussions, it was Carter’s version the one that stirred the most controversy as the students wanted to revisit the original tales to see where had the author had based the eroticism on since Carter’s version was longer and was a more sensual
tale not intended for little children. Some of them were shocked to see how their perception of the original tales had changed after reading Carter’s version. What I enjoyed the most about this unit was being able to guide students to discover all the themes that could be present in stories and how author’s lives related to the writing they did. As we finished this unit I felt that my students were now ready to take on those stories from the canon that the students I had before them had found very difficult to read, understand and relate to.

As the semester progressed and we read stories that were closer to our experiences, we began to share our own stories with each other. In my classroom there were no off limits topics, we talked about everything very comfortably. All of us knew each other and cared for one another. We shared anecdotes, accomplishments, disappointments, laughs and tears. In other words, we became a community. We did this completely in English, in Spanish at times and even in Spanglish which demonstrates how for minority students, having the freedom of using the languages that they “feel” in comes across to their most intense emotions and who in a traditional English classroom would have been prevented by the language barrier. So in my classroom, we were allowed to switch languages as we pleased and Spanish was not forbidden like I used to do in the past. Our encounters with Hawthorne, Poe, Hemingway, as well as with Perkins Gilman and Chopin, Hughes, Ortiz, and Santiago helped us all learn about other and the struggles and challenges that we had as women, men, students, daughter, sons, Christians, as people of color and Puerto Ricans in the U.S, or any other part of the world. Apparently, the ranking experience made me aware that education is political and after that realization my sense of social justice had kicked in and I now wanted to engage in knowledge construction models that allowed students to question their everyday realities and consider the possibilities that they had within their families, society and the world.
Apparently my selection of stories had been useful for helping students make connections between the literature and their lives. We all enjoyed stories that presented moral and religious conflict as well as identity, and women’s quest for independence. While discussing the readings, we talked about our family, friends, teachers and all those who had played important roles in our lives. We also talked about traumatic and important experiences that had impacted our lives in positive as well as in negative ways. As we uncover the themes in the stories and students chose those they were going to write about, students’ writing became more intense and personal. I also noticed that their writing had improved a lot from those first samples they gave me during our first day together. Students were making great connections between what they read and what they lived.

When the time came for me to say goodbye to my students, I asked them to write an evaluation of the course. The reason why I did this was because the head of the department needed to document how successful or unsuccessful my not using the anthology textbook had been. Much to my surprise, the evaluations of the course became loving letters and poems from my students encouraging me to keep being the teacher I was. Most of these letters wrote very inspirational letters encouraging me to stay strong while in Gringolandia because my life here was not going to be easy and for succeeding in my doctoral studies. Others thanked me for teaching them more about life than about English while others thanked me for teaching them to read and think critically. But above all, each one of them told me that they would never forget me because I had been the first real human being they have had as a teacher. These letters showed me that my biggest asset as a teacher was being a member of my students’ culture and being aware of their challenges and struggles as I had experienced some of them myself.

85 The U.S.
In this chapter, I have described my encounters with English and the beliefs and perceptions I developed because of them. I have also described a turning point in my life when I decided to start questioning and contesting everything I had been exposed to and decided to share the experience with my students. I feel that the experiences that I had during that year prior to my relocation to the U.S. set the stage for the most important part of this journey to colonial experience, the part when I reconnected with my *Boricua* culture and language in the land of the colonizer. This part of the journey is described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN:  
BRINCANDO EL CHARCO86

El Cinco de Mayo

_Pennsylvania, U.S._ A boy and a girl enter the kitchen as their mom gives them some milk and cookies. The telephone rings, she quickly washes her hands and picks up the phone.

“Hello”, I say catching my breath.
“Hi, is this NanVan?” says the woman’s voice.
“Yes, this is she. I try to remember whose voice I’m listening to. “Who is this?” I finally ask.
“This is Jennifer, I don’t know if you remember me”, she changes to a more cheery tone. “I am the beauty product consultant that you met at your friend’s place about a month ago”.
“Oh! Of course I do!” I smile, “How are you?”
“I’m doing very well, thank you. I was thinking about you and your friends earlier today. ”
“Really? I try to hide the surprise in my voice. “Why?”
“Well, I was thinking about how much I enjoyed my visit to your friend’s house and how nice you and your friends were to me.” She pauses. “I was also thinking about your food…it was so good! So delicious!”
“Thank you so much!” That’s so nice of her! I smile again. “I’m glad you enjoyed it!”
“The reason why I’m calling is because I don’t know if you remember that I’m a teacher.”
“Oh, yeah, I remember.” I think she’s going to ask me for a favor. “Elementary right?” I ask.
“Yes, that’s correct,” She pauses before she continues. “Well, I was wondering if you could come to my class the first week of May to talk to my third grade students about the _Cinco de Mayo_ celebration.”
WHAT? I stare at the phone trying to recover from the initial shock. “Excuse me? _Did I hear right? Does she think I’m Mexican?_ “I’m afraid I can’t, um…I’m not Mexican you know?”
“But…” She hesitates and sounds confused. “I don’t think I understand.”
Once again she pauses. “But…but…you speak Spanish don’t you?”
“Yeah, I do, but the problem is that I’m not Mexican.” I pause again trying to explain myself better. “I don’t even know what this 5 de Mayo celebration is about. I am from Puerto Rico, the U.S. territory in the Caribbean.”

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86 This phrase literally means jumping the puddle. In Puerto Rico, the phrase is commonly used to refer to the act of moving out of the Island to the U.S. Mainland. I am using this phrase in reference to Negron-Muntaner’s documentary with the same name (1994).
After a few seconds of complete silence she speaks again. “Well, wouldn’t you’d be at least interested to come to my class and teach my students some Spanish?"

Are you kidding me lady? I take a big breath trying not to sound too sarcastic. “Well, I guess I could. Instead of talking about this MEXICAN” I emphasize the word, “celebration, I could speak to them about my country, PUERTO RICO.” I take another big breath as I continue, “and yes, I could even throw in a few phrases in Spanish for your students.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you so much! She sounds relieved as she changes to the cheerful tone again. “That would be wonderful! I’ll call you again later this week to coordinate your visit.”

“Great,” I say trying to sound excited.
“Talk to you soon then!”
“Sure, bye.”
“Good Bye.”

She hangs up the phone and as I hang up mine I stare at my hand at the phone. “What the hell just happened? I chuckle. Oh my God! And this woman is a teacher? What are they teaching people here? That all Spanish speakers are Mexican? I guess I’ll have to clarify that for them in my presentation!

NanVan, 2006

Strangers in the country of their citizenship: Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

Although for the majority of estadounidenses, the Latino presence in the U.S. seems to be a recent phenomenon, the reality is that Latinos have been present in the U.S. since 1513. That year, beginning with the arrival of Juan Ponce de Leon to the Florida Coast, Spaniards were the first group of Spanish-speaking [European] settlers to establish themselves in what later became U.S. territory which also made them the second-longest of all U.S. ethnic groups after Native Americans to inhabit the land. Little by little, as Spanish colonizers mixed with the indigenous population in the Caribbean, Mexico and the U.S. the mestizos began to spread around what later became U.S. land. An example of this can be seen in the ancestors of the Chicanos who were
Indigenous peoples from Mexico and the U.S. who mixed with the Spanish colonizers. As Anzaldúa (1987) further explains:

Our Spanish, Indian, and mestizo ancestors explored and settled parts of the U.S. Southwest as early as the sixteenth century. For every gold-hungry conquistador and soul hungry missionary who came north of Mexico, ten or twenty Indians and mestizos went along as porters or in other capacities. For the Indians, this constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlan, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest. Indians and mestizos from central Mexico intermarried with North American Indians. The continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater mestizaje (p.27).

Furthermore, from 1819 to 1898, the U.S increased its area and domination in the American continent at the expense of Spain and Mexico. When in 1846 the U.S. started a war with Mexico, U.S. military forces invaded Mexico and by the end of the war, Mexico lost most of its original land. The Mexican land that was ceded to the U.S. by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo consisted of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. As the Monroe’s Manifest Destiny ideas gained popularity so did the U.S. expansion in American continent. It was only a matter of time until the U.S. started expanded to the Caribbean.

As the U.S. continued its expansion, expanding to the Caribbean was seen as an important move because of the political and economical potential that it presented at a moment when the U.S. was establishing itself as World power. As Grosfoguel (2003) states:

The Caribbean was perceived by U.S. political elites as an important region for both commercial routes to South America and as a strategic military location for the defense of the U.S. mainland against European invasion (Estades-Font, 1988). These two considerations mobilized political elites to establish an aggressive strategy of direct military interventions for the political economic control of the region (p. 132).

One of these interventions led to another war, the Spanish-American War, which ended giving the U.S. total control over the colonies that Spanish had left. Among those colonies was P.R. As the U.S. publicly denounced Spanish abuse in P.R as a reason to intervene in Spanish colonial affairs; as soon as P.R. was acquired through The Treaty of Paris which ceded the Island from
Spanish control to U.S. control, U.S. government established a military government and an aggressive Americanization process\textsuperscript{87} in schools. As the U.S. expanded its domination through treaties, purchases and wars, the U.S. managed to lead the inhabitants of these lands who had formerly been colonized by Spain to become U.S. citizens. Many generations have passed and even when Latinos are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, regardless of nationality, economic status and linguistic abilities, they are still seen as strangers in a nation that was home of their ancestors or has become home to new arrivals. Among those groups Latinos we can find Puerto Ricans.

When Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship in 1917, Puerto Ricans gained the freedom to migrate back and forth from the Island to the Mainland, this circular movement which Duany calls el vaiven has led to the establishment of many Puerto Rican communities in the Mainland. Although Puerto Ricans have managed to establish themselves all over the U.S. territory (including Hawaii), a fact is that some of the most popular destinations for Puerto Ricans to migrate to are New York City, Chicago, Orlando and Texas (Duany, 1999). Accordingly, in cities where one can find large concentrations of Puerto Ricans there is more awareness about the political relationship between P.R. and the U.S., but that is not the case in places where few Puerto Ricans venture to relocate.

“We can’t accept that check, we don’t take pesos”, “Tell me again, in which part of Mexico is Puerto Rico located?”, “Do you have a visa?”, “Could you come to our school to talk about \textit{Cinco de Mayo}?”, “I like your accent”, “Where did you learn to speak English?” “Why didn’t you stay in P.R. to get your doctoral degree?” “Are you legal?” How long have you been in America?” These were some of the comments and/or questions that I had to constantly deal with when I relocated to the U.S. to pursue my doctoral degree. Back home, I did not have to

\textsuperscript{87} Chapter 2 and 4 explain these in more detail.
deal with any of these questions since in P.R. everyone is well aware of our relationship with the U.S. However, when faced with these questions in the land of our colonizer, I came to terms with the idea that regardless of having U.S. citizenship, our history and political relationship with the U.S. are not widely known in the U.S. Apparently for a wide majority of U.S. nationals, P.R. is just another exotic, Spanish-speaking country somewhere in Latin America. This is an idea that was unimaginable to me growing up in P.R. since my family and school taught me everything that I needed to know about the U.S. Throughout my schooling, I had studied U.S. history and that of their patriots, so I had assumed that the same was done with our history and our patriots in U.S. schools. Little did I know then that it would take me twenty years and moving away from the Island to understand how mistaken I was when confronted with the fact that the majority of U.S. citizens were completely unaware of our political relationship with the U.S. which led to the unequal treatment of Puerto Ricans.

The first glance I got of this was during a visit to my prospective graduate school in the U.S. When I first considered the option of pursuing a doctoral degree, I had limited myself to search for graduate schools in P.R. so I could count on my family to help me with my children during my studies. Nevertheless, when the university where I graduated from signed an agreement with a prestigious university in the U.S., I decided to expand those options. The agreement presented an opportunity to graduates from our department to apply to the university and once accepted on our own merits, we would be granted a fellowship that would cover for tuition costs and provide a monthly stipend to help with living expenses. The decision of applying to this university in the U.S. was mostly motivated by the ranking experience described in the previous chapter. In part, I was curious to see whether I possessed enough merits and abilities to be accepted in a U.S. doctoral program. After I submitted my application, I was
invited to the university for a visit and during the four days I spent there I met professors and classmates, and was very excited to see that the option of having a life “over here” with my children seemed possible. For starters, everything took less time and paperwork than in P.R. During my three day visit, I was able to request, fill out and submit most of the paperwork I needed to qualify for financial aid, I also had plenty of time to apply for an apartment, visit my children’s prospective school, meet with the school principal, my future professors and still have time to enjoy a Broadway show on campus. However, my experience at the show turned out to be bittersweet as it was the first time when I felt offended by those who I had admired so much while growing up.

The last day of my visit to campus I noticed a flyer advertising a West Side Story show which made me very proud because I considered this to be a Puerto Rican cultural event. I grew up watching West Side Story, my father’s favorite film, so I was familiarized with the story and lyrics. Later that night, as the lights dimmed and the familiar music began to play I could barely contain my excitement. However, I began to feel uncomfortable as soon as the actors playing the Puerto Ricans first appeared on stage and I realized that the actors playing the Puerto Ricans were brown-faced. My discomfort grew as the Anita character sang “America”; up to the point that I felt like running out of the auditorium. Listening to the “Puerto Rican woman” wishing the Island to sink back in the ocean and criticizing its unemployment, the population growing, but worst of all, proclaiming the superiority of “America” over the Island was sickening. Why was she saying those awful things about Puerto Rico? Were those the same words I had sung along to with my father? Why did these words bother me now? I attribute the discomfort to the fact that this time, these words were coming out of the mouth of a brown-faced gringa and not from “real” Puerto Ricans like myself. I felt outraged because for me, it was unacceptable that people
who did not know anything about our history or our people could criticize our country. In complete disbelief I witnessed the audience’s enthusiastic reaction as she “trashed” P.R. and their “patriotism” when she praised “America” and all the wonderful things it had to offer. After the performance ended, the relief I felt vanished when the performers came back on stage for their final bows. Those who played the Jets (the gringos) received standing ovations—which was something I had anticipated—but much to my surprise, those who played the Sharks (the Puerto Ricans) were booed off the stage. At that moment, I felt insulted because these were actors pretending to be Puerto Ricans, and to me, it seemed as if to the audience, “Puerto Ricans” did not deserve standing ovations or applauses as the estadounidenses did. As a Puerto Rican, I felt that perhaps these students without even really knowing anything about PR, they seemed to know “enough” in order to reject everything we represented.

As I walked out of that auditorium I felt a combination of embarrassment, anger and sadness. On the plane ride to P.R., I kept thinking about the experience and finally understood what my father meant when he said that the reason why he liked the musical so much was because he had lived the character’s struggles. It was at that moment when I realized that if I was going to relocate to the Mainland I had to “grow thicker skin” because life in Gringolandia was not going to be as simple as I thought it would be. Yet, I do not know why, farther from scaring me, the experience made my resolve to come live in the Mainland even stronger.

Once I was officially accepted to the graduate program, the sudden boost of confidence dissipated most of the insecurities I had developed after my ranking experience and helped me focus on my new goals: my relocation to the U.S. and the completion of a doctoral degree. So, after my visit, I came back telling my family how wonderful the experience had been and focused on sharing the positive aspects of the visit, and kept to myself what had really happened
at the West Side show. Without any hesitation, I started to plan for my move to the Mainland, a move that my husband and my mother were completely against. They both claimed that it was going to be too challenging for me to be a full-time doctoral student, a graduate teaching assistant and a mother. In addition, since they had helped me while pursuing my Master’s degree, they were convinced that not having close family nearby to help with the children was going to be problematic. My mother, especially, kept picturing possible emergency scenarios to illustrate what could happen to us “over there” if I did not have any close family to depend on. When I told my mother that I had two friends there who would help me, my mother replied that “friends are not family”.

As I seemed more resolved in my decision of leaving, my mami’s anxiety of “losing” me—as she called it—led her develop more subtle ways to persuade me to change my decision. I have always been close to my children, so when she suggested that I leave the kids back in P.R. with her, she completely took me by surprise. She tried to convince that women who were career driven should not have kids. She made me feel guilty for wanting to pursue my goal and as I realized what she was trying to do, I resented her for it. At one point I even considered the option, but since I had never been away from my children for more than three days, I did not think that was an appropriate option for me. I was convinced that I was strong enough to manage both motherhood and a career, perhaps not as efficiently as stay-at-home mothers do, but I felt that I could serve as a model for my children if they saw that their mother could accomplish her goals and dreams in life.

Much to my surprise my mother-in-law—who I thought was going to be opposed to my move to the States—became the person who supported my decision the most. At the time, she was also teaching at my university and was fully aware of the benefits that the opportunity
represented for my academic career in that institution. She strongly encouraged me to take advantage of the opportunity because a doctorate would secure a position in the university as well as benefit my children in terms of them becoming fully bilingual and experiencing living in another culture. This was something that she had dreamt for herself and her children but could not accomplish because of the lack of support from her own family. So, for the first time in my life, I decided to override my mother’s voice in my head and not let her limit my possibilities, so I sold everything I owned, packed the few belongings I had along with my beloved children and brincamos el charco88 six years ago.

_Becoming Boricua in the U.S._

_The “American” Doctor_

_Pennsylvania, U.S.A._ A couple is sitting at the kitchen table. They are discussing how to get a new prescription for his insulin. The husband has just arrived to the Mainland and is not yet covered by his wife’s health insurance.

If only they had a Walgreens here. They have his medical record on file. My thoughts are interrupted by my husband.

“Maybe I should go to the emergency room”

“No way! That’s our last option. You have no idea of how much they charge for just going there, not to mention that the ER doctor also bills you separately.” There must be another way. What other pharmacy do we have there besides Walgreens? “Help me out here,” I beg him as I start to lose my patience. Wait a second...why didn’t I think about that before...Walmart, of course! “I got it! We might not have a Walgreens but we have Walmart!! I smile at him. “Call your mom and ask her to get a prescription from your doctor and to take it to the Walmart in Mayaguez, once there, she can ask them to transfer that prescription to the Walmart here!”

“You’re right! I hadn’t thought about that! You are a genius!” He rushes out of the kitchen.

“While you call her,” I raise my voice so he can hear me. “I’ll call Walmart to explain.”

“OK!” He yells from the room upstairs. “Estoy marcando a mami89!”

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88 Came to the Mainland.
89 I’m dialing mom’s number.
I get the phone book and start looking for the number. *Here it is!* I grab the phone, dial and wait for someone to answer. “Hi, could you please connect me to the pharmacy? Thanks!”

“Walmart’s Pharmacy, how can I help you?”

“Hi, my husband just relocated to the area, and since he’s about to run out of insulin, we were wondering if you would accept a prescription transfer from another Walmart for him to be able to get his insulin here?”

“No problem, could you give me the store number from where the prescription would be transferred from?”

“I’m afraid I don’t have that number…but could you look it up if I give you the location?”

“Sure, no problem.”

“The store is located in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico”

“I’m afraid we won’t be able to do this,” she says as her tone completely turns antagonistic.

“Really, may I ask why?” *Why the change in tone? I wonder if this have anything to do with the store location.*

“Well, this would be considered international and we don’t do transfers from international locations,” she bluntly says.

*Here we go again.* “Oh, I understand that, but you are mistaken, because Puerto Rico is domestic not international.”

The attendant completely ignores my previous remark and bluntly says “we just don’t take transfers from international locations.”

“Excuse me, didn’t you hear me just now? I ask, my voice an octave high with frustration. “Puerto Rico is NOT international, we are a U.S. Commonwealth!”

“Sorry, we have a no international prescription transfer policy.”

*Not again, this is not happening again!* *Same crap as in the bank!* I try to control my anger as it starts racing to my head. I do my best to calm myself before I try to explain again.

“Maam, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, so we are not international!”

She remains quiet for a few seconds before she says, “I can transfer you to our pharmacy manager, if you like.”

“Please do!” My husband is now back in the kitchen and giving me a puzzled look. *He’s wondering why I raised my voice earlier.* I feel the need to explain. “No me quieren hacer el cambio por que dizque somos internacionales”

“Ay chica pero no te pongas asi! Engancha entonces!”

“NO chico, no!” I cover the phone with my hand since I’m still on hold. “No me da la gana! I will educate this people!”

After what it seems like forever, I hear a voice on the other side. “This is Jane Doe speaking, how can I help you?”

“Hello, I just asked my call to be transferred to you because I think that the attendant didn’t understand me well.

Well, she has explained the situation to me,” she says using that patronizing tone that I hate. “and there’s nothing we can do about that…it is an international transfer and we’re not allowed to do that in here.”

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90 They don’t want to make the transfer because they consider us international.
91 Don’t get like that, just hang up then!
92 I’m not letting this one pass.
“Ok,” I pause for a second before I change my tone to a more sarcastic one. “Could you then explain me how can Puerto Ricans enlist in the U.S. Armed Forces and fight and die for a country that is not theirs?” *I hope she gets my sarcastic tone. Let’s see what you make out of this.*

“Excuse me?” she asks in a confused tone.

“You heard me…I want to know how in the world an international country can enlist their citizens to serve in YOUR armed forces, unless they are part of that country.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know how to answer that,” the confused attendant replies.

“Well, I thought you might be able to, since you have so emphatically denied my request for the prescription transfer from a U.S. Commonwealth to another.

“Maam, you don’t understand, the real reason is that the prescription has to be issued by an American doctor!”

*That’s it!* “Lady! The prescription was issued by an AMER-RICAN doctor!” I pause as I take a big breath before I continue, “Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, not by choice but by imposition when YOUR country invaded MY country over 100 years ago! We are part of your America too”

Her confusion shows in her voice as she hesitates. “I don’t know what to say! Umm….well, company policy is company policy.” She nervously continues. “Let me assure you that even if you were trying this from Canada, I would still have to say no.”

“You know what…I seriously doubt that.” I say angrily. I pause for a second trying to get my cool back, so I take a huge breath before continuing. “Anyway, I won’t bother you with my problems…my husband is going to run out of insulin soon and I should focus my time and energy in solving that problem instead of on giving a history lesson here. *En Puerto Rico esto nunca me hubiese pasado*!”

“I suggest you take him to the ER for the prescription.” She says apologetically.

“Don’t worry, I’ll figure something out” Good bye! I hang up the phone and let out a loud angry shriek “ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

My husband looks at my in complete disbelief as he says in a low voice “I’m guessing I’m not getting my insulin there”

“No, honey, you’re not! But you know what the worst part is…the ignorance, the not knowing anything about us. When we have to learn everything about them! This happened to me…someone who can speak their language, imagine how they treat people who can’t speak their language!

NanVan, 2006

When I relocated to the U.S. my husband accompanied us for a couple of weeks before the semester began to help us settle in and provide some peace of mind to my concerned mother and the rest of the family back home. At first, the change was like an adventure to all of us; going yard sale hunting and purchasing furniture and appliances for our new home. However, the moment I saw my husband step on the bus that would take him to New Jersey to catch his flight

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93 This would have never happened to me in P.R.
back home, was the moment when the full impact of my decision of relocating caught up with me. As I watched the bus driving away from us and my children happily waving goodbye to their father, I came to the realization that for the first time in my life I was on “my own” and away from the life I knew, accompanied only by my children, who now completely depended on me. As I found myself uncontrollably shaking and crying, I wondered if I had made the right decision. As we walked back home, my children asked me why was I crying and I told them that I was going to miss their dad. They hugged me and told me: “Mami everything is going to be ok, he’ll be back for Christmas, he promised.” So, like my mother that first day she left me in school, I wiped away my tears and smiled at my children as they reassured me that everything was going to be fine and I believed them. From that moment on, I focused on helping myself and my children adapt to the experience because I did not want to go back home defeated.

Once school started and we became used to our daily routine, life became more bearable for the three of us. I prepared a schedule which provided the kids with enough study time, reading time, play time, and responsibilities. I assigned my children house chores—which they had never been assigned before—to help us keep our sanctuary clean and organized. Since in addition, there was a free after-school program especially designed for the children of those of us who lived on campus, my kids made friends in no time and seemed to be adjusting to their new environment very well. They loved their school, friends and neighbors and their English was improving every day and for that I felt relieved. By mid semester, everything was going better than I had expected. The family back home was also feeling more at peace since my husband’s tales of our new home reassured them that the kids—me included—were safe and my weekly updates kept them informed about all of our accomplishments. During the day, while the children were at school and I had plenty of time to dedicate to my studies and those nights when
I did not have night classes, I was devoted to my children. Those nights I had class, however, my girl friends took turns watching my children and I did the same for them. During weekends we strengthen our friendship as we had impromptu potluck dinners, movie nights and shopping field trips—as we called them—among other activities that helped us become each other’s families. By the time the holiday break began, most of our families—my in-laws and my husband instead of my parents in my case—came to spend the holiday break with us making the holiday break feel as if we were in P.R.

**Becoming political: the impact of viewing the documentary La operación**

![Collage](image)

*From the collage “La Operación, 2004*

The successful completion of my first semester in graduate school encouraged me to expand my options in course work as a way to identify my possible areas of study. During my second semester, I registered in a course on Paulo Freire who, at the time, I did not know who he

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94 The operation
was or knew anything about his contributions to the field of education. I had been a teacher for almost nine years and yet, I had never heard of this amazing educator before this class. There were two reasons why I signed up for this class; first, my Puerto Rican friends had taken it and had told me that it was life-changing; and second, the class was taught by the only female Puerto Rican professor in the department. I had heard much about her but it was not until my first day of classes that I actually met her. During our second week of classes, one of our assignments was to attend a screening of a documentary called *La operación* during class time and then report back to our classroom for a discussion. The only detail that I knew about the documentary was that it was made by a Puerto Rican woman in the 1980’s. Once more, I felt extremely pleased to see that the university—the Women’s Studies Department this time—was sponsoring the showing of a documentary made by a Puerto Rican on campus.

As I entered the auditorium, I was completely unaware that the documentary was called *La Operación* because it recounted the stories of hundreds of women who had the procedure known as tube ligation—a method of birth control—done between the 1930’s up until the late 1970’s in P.R. and the U.S. The procedure became so popular among Puerto Rican women that *la operación* became the name by which the procedure was—and still is—referred to on the Island. Tube ligation as a means of population control was implemented in P.R. by the U.S. officials as part of a federal funded program that encouraged women in the peak of their reproductive years to get the operation in order to control the overpopulation on the Island. This initiative was put into action to complement Americanization in schools, as a way to promote among Puerto Ricans the idea that the less children a family had, the more opportunity they would have to succeed in the attainment of the “American Dream”. The issue that was explored in the documentary was that most of the women who signed up and agreed to the operation did
not know that the procedure was irreversible. The documentary described in detail how social workers visited factories and workplaces—where most of the employees were women—to encourage them to get the operation. Furthermore, it also explained how U.S. officials convinced the management at these workplaces to encourage women to get the operation by making the time they spent recuperating, count as part of their sick leave. The argument used to convince administrators was that their companies would save more money if they paid for a couple of days of sick leave instead of paying for maternity leave.

I must draw attention to the fact that I was completely unaware of this U.S. initiative. So, as I sat in that auditorium and watched the documentary, the same emotions I had felt during the West Side Story performance emerged again, but at a stronger rate this time. As I watched the women’s recollections unfold, I saw those women’s faces, strangers to me but at the same time so familiar. They looked like my mother, my abuelas, my mother’s friends and other Puerto Rican women who I knew. The pain I felt at that moment was unbearable. What really infuriated me was watching a mayor of one of our towns in P.R. praise the success of the program in his town since they had to close down a few of the elementary schools because there were not enough small children to attend. The following vignette illustrates my emotions after the documentary ended:

While people by my side collect their belongings and leave, my eyes scan the room looking for a sympathetic look...I’m looking for somebody who can at least understand what I am going through right now! As I turn around I see a couple of compañeras Boricuas who were sitting in the back. My eyes start to water and I can see that they understand me because they are crying too...as I get closer to them they open their arms as we embrace and weep together...three female Puerto Rican bodies holding each other in tears in that cold
amphitheater...remembering our madres, our tías, our vecinas, our mujeres95... no words are necessary...our tears of solidarity y el abrazo de hermanas nos consuela96. The pain, the outrage, the realization that all of this happened right before our very eyes and we never saw it...until now...so far from home...in the land of those who did this to our women!

When we finally step out of the room... a question breaks the silence...

“How in the world do we have to come here to find out about this?” One of my friends says as she angrily wipes the tears from her eyes.

“I cannot believe the audacity of these gringos.” The other says as she raises her voice. What do they think we are, cattle? A research lab? Mira97, I am SOOO angry.”

“Welcome to the club!” I say. “What I am wondering is how come have we never heard of this federal program before?” And then a sudden realization hits me and my voice shakes as I’m finally able to utter another question: ¿Será por eso que operaron a mi mami tan joven98?”

As I walked back to the building where I was expected back to discuss the documentary, I was so angry that I decided to call my mother to ask her the reason why she had the operation right after having my brother—her second child—when she was only twenty years old. She told me that while she was in the delivery room, her gynecologist had told her that since she had a heart murmur, the wisest thing she could do was to have the operation to avoid risking her life by attempting a third or fourth child. She did not remember whether it was her or my dad who immediately signed the consent forms. When I told Mami details from the documentary regarding the reasons for implementing the program and the techniques that were used to trick women into having the operation, all she could say was the same phrase that all those women in the documentary repeated to their interviewers: “If only I had known better!” Accordingly, based on the possibility that my mother was also tricked into getting the operation really outraged me and this time I decided not to remain silent.

95 Aunts, neighbors, women
96 Our sisterly embrace comfort us.
97 Look
98 Could this be the reason why my mother got the operation at such a young age?
I went back to my class and shared with everyone exactly how I felt during and after watching the documentary. Since one of the Puerto Rican girls with whom I experienced the movie was in my class, we took our classmates with us in our emotional rollercoaster ride as we tried to make sense of what the U.S. had done to Puerto Rican women. My classmates were as surprised as we were and those who were U.S. nationals even apologized to us as—as if they were the responsible for this. The professor actively participated in our discussion and asked us to channel all that anger and frustration into a more creative and positive enterprise, thus she asked us to start thinking about other people who had been wronged and/or silenced by others and on ways in which we could help them. As a result of the group’s discussion that day, our final collective project began to take shape. That day, we decided to create an unconventional quilt that we would display at the university’s student center. The quilt was going to include pictures and visual representations of women to whom we would like to give a voice to. My friend (the other Puerto Rican in the class) and I decided to give voice to Puerto Rican women who had been deceived into having the operation.

As the semester progressed and the discussions in the classroom became more personal as our reading list introduced me to Freire, Latina Feminist theory and critical pedagogy, as I began to question everything I knew: my family, our [P.R.] history, the banking model education I was given, the type of woman, mother and teacher that I was. The weekly journals and the discussions in class helped me cope and express my inner struggle and the confusion I felt while reading about oppression, colonization and marginalization. Looking back, I realize that this was perhaps the first moment I acknowledged that English was my language of liberation and that teaching stopped being “neutral” and became a political act of love and hope. That was something that I had never been taught during my teaching training, but felt was something that I
had practiced in my class. I reflected on my teaching experience and realized that there were times when I had unconsciously engaged in some of the practices and types of teaching I was reading about now. Although at the time I was teaching, I had engaged in some of these practices that I was learning about now, I did not know there were theories that explained what I was doing. At that moment I only wanted to identify what I had been doing and wanted to know more. The idea of learning more about these theories and actively reflecting on my teaching made me feel empowered and that was a feeling that I definitively wanted to share with others I knew, family, students and teachers alike. As the semester was coming to an end and the date for displaying our collective project approached, as a collective we spent many hours planning and preparing the materials that were to be included in the quilt. As a result, the group got closer inside as well as outside of the classroom. We started to study together, spend time together and gave each other support when we shared the struggles that we all had as doctoral students. Thanks to the Freire class, I learned the importance of dialogue and of the sharing experiences with each other in the classroom as well as outside of it. Thus, sharing became my philosophy around my home and my public space.

Sharing the experience of the documentary and the process of creating our part of the installation together drew my Puerto Rican classmate and I closer. As our passion for finding ways in which we could help our people was brewing inside of us, we decided that our part of the installation was going to have three goals: (1) inform people about the relationship between P.R. and the U.S.; (2) make people question the nature of this relationship; and (3) give voice to the voiceless Puerto Rican women who were mislead into getting the operation. In order to accomplish these three goals, my friend and I decided to find a collection of pieces of clothing that reminded us of Puerto Rican women. We chose clothing as our means to convey our
message since to us by recreating the image of women’s laundry hanging on a wire was such a powerful image to us because it reminded us of home, our home country and the women in our lives. Each piece of clothing had pictures of Puerto Rican women—among them my mother, that were iron transferred to the piece of clothing. These pieces of clothing were one very colorful bata de casa, several blouses and skirts and one pillowcase which instead of pictures, it included a brief summary of the colonial relationship between P.R. and the U.S. and a brief explanation of the birth control sterilization program implemented on the Island. On top of the pillowcase we wrote La Operacion: poverty control or genocide? Across from that we had a map of Puerto Rico followed by Puerto Rico: U.S. Commonwealth or U.S. Laboratory? Once our part was finished and we join the others to put together the quilt, it was a very overwhelming experience. There were tears of joy and sadness as we looked at the women represented in the quilt. There were our mothers, our sisters and even women who we did not know, but that did not matter. They all shared a common bond, they had been silenced and it was our responsibility to let others know what had happened to them. As we hung up that display at the student’s center, the emotion we all felt was overwhelming. Each one of us had attempted to give a “voice” to a woman whose story/ies had been silenced or wronged and by doing so, we felt empowered by our collective work. We hugged in front of the display and took pictures of us, the display and of the people who stopped by to look at it during the time we were there. The quilt was on display for a week, and even when many people did not see it or did not want to see it, the significance of this moment lies in the fact that it was that I had become political and deep down I knew that there was no way to go back to the way I was before.

As I grew more comfortable in this new skin and continued to develop a questioning stance, the more I enjoyed becoming political. As a result of this new stance, I began to share,

99 House dress, which are typically used by Puerto Rican abuelas.
question as well as express my thoughts freely in my classes without being afraid. Interestingly enough, a series of encounters with people and situations where I found myself putting all of my new knowledge and experience into action fueled the fire within as I began to visit schools and go into classrooms on campus to either talk about P.R. or la operación. I did this motivated not only by la operación experience, but also because of my interactions in the U.S. with people who seem to have very narrow views about Latinos as well. For many of them, all Latinos fit under the same label, a label that erased our diverse cultures, histories and experiences. The vignette at the beginning of this chapter is an illustration of this practice. For the estadounidense teacher who inspired the scene at the beginning of this chapter, it seemed that if you were Latino, it was assumed that we were part of the same culture since we all spoke Spanish and were not [in her eyes] U.S. citizens. This was something that made me feel really uncomfortable because in my particular case, everytime I had an encounter like this [even within classrooms] I felt as a second-class citizen since I felt that the lack of knowledge about our relationship with their country denied me the rights that as citizen of this nation I also had. Every time I encountered someone who did not know where Puerto Rico was or that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens, I felt deeply offended because it felt as if Puerto Ricans had been completely excluded from U.S history whereas in P.R. it was the other way around since U.S. history, culture, and language were everywhere.

What is worth noting here is the fact that interactions described in this section raise very important questions regarding hegemony and the awareness that individuals have of the assumptions that they support as members of particular communities and the role that they play in the upholding or challenging of these. The documentary experience along with the nurturing of a questioning stance within the classroom context provided me with the opportunity to engage
in ways of thinking that I had never experienced before as I questioned and challenged the knowledge that I had been “given”, and yet, even though I had gained a certain amount of awareness about these, and was willing to engage in counter-hegemony, there were still times when I went back to my colonized ways. To this experience, I turn now.
Confronting the colonized within

During my third year in the graduate program, I enrolled in a narrative inquiry class to explore the possibility of adopting this methodology for my dissertation research. Although I had read about scholars who had engaged in the use of this methodology I was curious about how to actually put this idea into practice. Just like the Freire class two years before, I felt at home from day one. The class structure was very similar to the Freire class in terms of providing all of the students with a safe space to discuss, share and engage in creative weekly projects which turn out to be very useful to uncover our assumptions and ways of thinking. Every week we read a different book wrote a reading response to be discussed in class and during the last portion of the class we created our little projects to share before we parted ways. As I entered the class the first time, I thought I was prepared for the class, but much to my amazement during that semester I discovered that I was still very much attached to my old ways of thinking and that I was still attached to my old views of what research was. For example, when the time came for everybody to share what their research topic was, I told my professor and classmates that I wanted to investigate why Puerto Ricans after twelve years of English instruction could still not speak English fluently. Looking back, I cannot help but to feel embarrassed by that statement. How come after all I had discovered during my now three years in the States and coursework, I could still hold on to such a colonial mindset?

Even when I remember actively participating in class, reading the books, writing the journals and engaging in meaningful discussions and creative projects with my classmates yet, when the moment came to incorporate all of that new knowledge into the class final project, I was unable to do so. The final project of the class had two components: one was performing your research and the other one was writing the final reflective paper. Back then, it was my goal
to interview Puerto Rican English teachers to explore their views on why they thought that their Puerto Rican students rejected English and even when I had clearly conveyed the idea of what I wanted to do in my project during the final performance for the class, I was still unable to articulate these clearly in the written component of the assignment. This is something that really frustrated me because I felt that there was something limiting by my mind and my abilities. Later on, as I discussed my paper with the professor, she explained to me that I still had many assumptions that I needed to confront as these were limiting my worldview. What really frustrated me was that I had assumed that I had already overcome these and being told that I had not, made me feel very uncomfortable. After all, I felt a connection to my classmates and the class, as I did I engage in meaningful relationships with my classmates and became familiarized with scholars who explored their own identities and consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Behar, 1996; and Richardson), but apparently I still did not comprehend the profound impact that the colonial experience had in my life as I was still being blinded my the veil that my own assumptions put in my eyes.

For that reason, I was recommended to take courses on Women’s Studies and Latino Studies. It was while taking these courses that I really allowed myself to immerse in the literature and fully explore what your assumptions can do to you. By engaging in the work of scholars who have made explored the complexities of being a woman of color (Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Narayan, 1997; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Negrón-Muntaner, 2005); and those who have decided to denounce and theorize conditions of social injustice (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989; Walsh 1991; Shannon, 1992; Giroux 2001), I was finally able to gain a better understanding of who I was and what my circumstances were both in the Mainland and the Island.
It was only after I completely stepped out of my comfort zone, my colonial mindset and really analyzed the reasons why I was experiencing first hand being other-ed on a daily basis that I began to realize that all my life I had felt *gringa*, and discovering that I was really not had really hurt me and I did not want to accept it. Back in P.R., I kept my *Puertorriqueñidad* at bay, in an attempt to shield myself from labels (Oboler, 1995; Villenas, 1996) or to be perceived as inferior due to my working class background and the assumptions regarding the power and status of English (Phillipson, 1991; Pennycook, 1998, Macedo, 2003) to which I had attached myself to while growing up. My Other-ing experiences in the Mainland led me to understand that I have more in common with other Latino and underrepresented minorities in the U.S. than with those members of the culture that I had idealized all my life.

While living in the U.S. I have learned to develop more sensibility and awareness of my fellow Latino’s everyday struggles which makes me more open to understanding what living in-between cultures means. Living-in-between-cultures is how you feel when you do not belong here nor there (Anzaldúa, 1987) and it also influences how you mediate between “Us” and “Them”. I have also become a border crosser as I have moved to more open ways of thinking and acting. As a result, I am more aware of my mixed races and languages which allow me to become a mediator between cultures, with more positive than negative results. However, as I look back at my experiences, I notice that I have the tendency at times to go back to conforming to present situations without really questioning, confronting or naming my circumstances and how they came to exist. Consequently, this led me to become an accomplice in my own colonization (Memmi, 1965; Villenas 1996).
However, the stage of my journey where I experienced feeling labeled and treated as “other” has also caused my *Puertorriqueñidad* to awake while away from the Island. It had been there somewhere dormant within my soul, waiting for the moment to surface and that moment was now. My relocation to the U.S. made me feel more Puerto Rican than I had ever felt while in the Island. I now understood the struggles of those from the Island as well as those who have been here all of their lives. The experience of *brincar el charco* has led the way for me to the theories and type of research that connects my recently acquired questioning stance, and new ways of seeing and experiencing the world into making my life the source of inquiry for this project.
CHAPTER EIGHT:
CONCLUSIONS

Performing my research, 2007

El Despertar: A Research Performance

As the song “American Girl” by Tom Petty played throughout the auditorium, an “American Woman” entered the room, with her head held high, she proudly stood in the center of the auditorium. She was wearing a cape made of dozens of American flags, an aesthetic expression of her love for “America”. It was somehow disturbing to see that she was also wearing a white mask yet one relaxed when saw that her white baseball cap had another American flag on it.

The “American Woman” came down the few steps that separated her from the audience to share with the public her pride, her nationalism, her love for her country. She walked throughout the audience, got closer, went further, turned, extended her cape to show the flags that have been embracing her body... suddenly, with an abrupt movement, she ripped off the flag on her baseball cap... the music blares loudly, the “American Woman” gave up the flag to the man next to her and continued walking. Something has changed, the “American” flags cape is slowly coming
down from her body... before completely losing it, the “American Woman” gave it to a student sitting on the floor leaving herself wrapped— from head to toe—in black tulle.

A new song, Nuestra Sangre, replaced the first booming patriotic sounds. The rhythm of the performance has further changed by the proud “American Woman” who was struggling with the black tulle that covered her entirely; she tried to get her face out, probably to see and to breathe better. During the struggle, concealed things were exposed, a small Puerto Rican flag hidden in her bosom and underneath white layer.

The “American Woman” efforts continued until she freed herself of the black tulle with the audience that left her wearing a flowing white layer. She did not look peaceful; she walked as a white apprehensive ghost with a quandary against the little Puerto Rican flag. The “American Woman” couldn’t decide either to share it or to hide it. Her anxiety was clear; her body was shaking and making odd movements. The “American Woman” took her time to make a decision but she creates a small safe space with her arms where she caresses her face with the Puerto Rican cloth of memories. At that moment, the white layer begins to slip down her body.

Unexpectedly, a rush of energy came into the “American Woman” body; it felt as if the little flag made the “American Woman” to remember the Other inside her. The Other that had been silenced by hundred years of oppression. The Other with an authentic sense of pride. The “American Woman” walked up the steps to the stage where, under the brightest light, she took off her white mask. There she was, a different being. She was standing tall and high, there were no more layers to shed, she had exposed conflicts, confusions, and contradictions to her bare skin. Softly, she moved, the light unveiled a tattooed body. The words hit the audience brains and eyes.
The last sounds of Nuestra Sangre were playing when the lights began to dim to dark. The audience had one last sight. She was standing up, arms opened, she was the incarnated vision of a vulnerable yet unconquerable woman; she was full of pain and power; she was struggle and promises, she was our mother, she was our voice, she was our history... she was each one of us.

Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, 2007
What is the impact of a colonial experience on a teacher’s life?

In this chapter, I share the findings of this inquiry. The main question that guided this inquiry was: What is the impact of colonial experience on a teacher’s life? In order to closely examine this question, I engaged in auto-biographical ways of writing to trigger memories of significant stages in my life journey so I could explore the filters through which I have and continue to experience the world (Behar, 1996). Throughout this inquiry I have identified these filters to be: my woman filter, my Puerto Rican filter, and my English non-native speaker and teacher filter. Furthermore, this study uncovered how these filters are constantly overlapping and shape not only my constructions of knowledge, but also the perceptions that I have of myself and of my relationships with others. As I revisited the ways in which these filters were constructed and were impacted by Puerto Rican colonial experience, I have discovered that many of the responses that I have engaged in while growing up were a result of both the constricting and enabling interactions with family, friends and teachers. Furthermore, these responses have informed most of my decisions later in life and for that reason this inquiry was helpful not only to explore the impact of colonial experience in my life, but also to question certain discourses and interactions may or may not have prevented me from becoming what I always wanted to be.

Growing up I had a very limiting view of the world due to some of my interactions at both the home and school space. As I learned more about the theories that I draw on for this study, I realize that I have learned how to walk away from restricting ways of thinking and have become more receptive to new and more encompassing ways of being and knowing later in life. That within what it seemed to be limiting personal and professional experiences lied moments of agency and resolve even if I did not know how to identify them that allowed me to adapt to my conditions and allowed me to appropriate English as a way to escape the constraining and
colonizing ideas and situations that I was exposed to while growing up. These results agree with the work of other Latinas (Anzaldua 1987; Villenas, 1996; Behar, 1996; The Latina Feminist Group Delgado-Bernal, D., Elenes, C.A, Godinez, F., Villenas, S., 2006) who have theorized their experiences and acknowledge that while their own communities have colonized them, they have also found ways to resist and walk away from these oppressive conditions. Furthermore, that when we choose to identify these conditions we need to reexamine the knowledge, languages and discourses that we acquired to be able to identify those moments where I engaged in negotiations and appropriations that allowed me to adapt and survive my colonial experiences.

An example of these moments are my interactions with my maternal grandmother who was one of my role models and whose contradictory teachings showed me both the limitations and possibilities as a woman. My maternal grandmother taught me about women and women roles and served both as an enforcer and challenger of the hegemonic discourse about women. Her teachings taught me that though women could negotiate their roles at the home space as we helped in nation building processes, at the same time taught me that religion limited the actions that as women we were allowed to have in the public space. These results agree with those of The Latina Feminist Group (2001) and Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez and Villenas (2006) in the sense that Latina experiences are based on colonialism and oppression but which can also be contested by resistance and hope. As women, we must both acknowledge that just as we have the freedom to build a better nation by educating the future members of our communities, we also have the freedom to reject relationships and ideas that hold us back and do not allow us to reach our highest potential.

Another important finding of this study is the colonizing role that religion played in my life. As I describe in Chapter four my Catholic upbringing at home and school, deeply impacted
many areas in my life, among them my understandings of what respect was. Since I was taught from a very early age that “speaking back” to your elders and superiors or that questioning your conditions was a sign of disrespect, I equaled remaining silent to a sign of respect. For that reason, when confronted with uncomfortable situations, I chose to remain silent in the face of injustice or unfair conditions. This finding agrees with those ideas from Freire (1985), who asserts that the role of the traditional church in the education of people is that of a colonizer. In my case, this proved to be true as my grandmother—who I view now as one of my colonizers—taught me to embrace and not to question the values presented to me by my family and religion since these would prepare me for my future as a Puerto Rican woman. Growing up and being schooled around traditional Catholics taught me that a woman’s future was full of heartache and suffering. Yet, they also taught me that my faith would sustain and prepare me for everlasting happiness in heaven. As Freire suggests, religion supports a series of beliefs that when embraced, serve as a very effective tool for colonizing an individual.

As I have presented in previous chapters, religion played a very important role in the colonial mindset that I developed as I learned to embrace the very beliefs that harmed me later in life. An example of this can be seen in the way I visualized respect which I translated to silence. In this view, one had to remain silent and should not question the divine plan that was designed by an all powerful, all knowing God who was ready to punish me if I challenged this plan by questioning. For this reason, I now see that religion served as the tool that crushed my sense of independence during my childhood and adolescence. Therefore, I learned to conform to fulfilling my expected role as a woman rather than on trying to pursue my own happiness. This notion of remaining silent as a sign of respect really impacted all the personal and professional relationships that I have engaged in throughout my life.
In addition, since my Catholic school experience in colonial P.R. followed a banking model of education (Freire, 1970) where not much critical thinking was encouraged, as result I also developed a very limited view of the world and of teaching. Schooling experiences should give students the opportunity to question the knowledge that they are being given since this allows them to better understand the world around them. Schooling experiences should also make students feel that they are being perceived as human beings whose backgrounds and experiences matter because when they are not, education then serves as a constricting force rather than a liberating one. As Freire (1970) explains:

Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women are historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take people’s stories as their starting point (p. 65).

As it can be seen in Chapter Four, my schooling experience did not prepare me to become a critical thinker as I grew accustomed to being a passive learner who was not given the opportunity to question the knowledge I was presented with and who learn that I should not question it since that would be considered disrespectful. For example, when presented with materials and teachers who emphasized the superiority of the U.S. and English, I accepted this knowledge and teacher’s opinions as true and since at home my father reinforced these ideas, I did not see the need to question these beliefs. For that reason, when I became a teacher, I tried to imitate my former teachers, thus perpetuating their misguided views of teaching. However, my experiences with this type of education led me to eventually become a teacher that even when at
times engaged in the role of a colonizer by trying to either force or lure my students to embrace English like I did, my teaching practice has never been as constraining as the one I experienced. Furthermore, when confronted with the idea that I was not “a good” English teacher, I started to question the reasons why people would think that and also decided to completely engage in a more critical way to teach English which allowed me to see the advantages and possibilities that it presents for students and teachers. After engaging in this type of teaching I decided that I could never go back to contribute to my students becoming passive receivers of knowledge.

An example of this can be seen in Chapter Five where I describe the last time I taught in P.R. prior to relocating to the U.S. which was my first attempt to engage in a more active and critical English teaching practice where students were given the chance to have a more active participation in their education. As that teaching experience revealed, once my classroom became a safe space, it also became a “space of possibility” (Simon, 19??) and once the students started to better understand the world around them, by reading about the struggles of others like them had, they were able to overcome their fears of the language as they focused on how they could connect the literature that they were reading with experiences in their own lives.

As I look back on my teaching practice, I also realize that I have also the tendency of “mothering my students.” Since my own experiences with my female teachers were always very impersonal, in my classroom I tried to be quite the opposite. From my very first day of classes I try to memorize their names and take the time to get to know my students better through our discussions in class and through their journals and other written assignments, so they would feel comfortable to come to my office with their doubts about the class as well as for just talking about their lives, their struggles, their dreams, hopes and frustrations. For that reason, as a
loving mother who feels proud of her children, I also feel proud of my students. Their accomplishments are my accomplishments and their personal tragedies are mine too.

Perhaps this has to do with the fact that during my first teaching experience I had three students who had recently lost their mothers and even when at the time I was only eight years older than them, they went to me for advice because they missed their mothers. For that reason, I tend to share personal stories about my life with my students, so they can relate to with my own struggles so they can see if I could overcome my challenges so can they. For that reason just like a mother who models behavior for her children, I model behavior for my students. I try to be an inspiring teacher who knows her students and who also gives them advice based on my own experiences. So in a way, enduring an oppressive schooling experience positively impacted my teaching as they made me a more compassionate English teacher.

**Pedagogical implications of this study**

An interesting finding of this journey into colonial experience is that only by knowing and understanding myself can I expect to know, understand and respect others. As a vulnerable researcher and teacher, a vulnerable type of inquiry and teaching practice taught me that there many ways to experience the world and when people from similar backgrounds begin to share their own ways of experiencing the world, silenced and untold stories begin to emerge and along with them the issues that their communities share and which perhaps have been overlooked by previous research. These results agree with those of critical educators (Freire, 1970, McLaren, 1989; and Giroux, 2001) who suggest that educators from colonized and marginalized communities should take the time to examine their teaching practice, so they can understand how
their own assumptions inform their teaching practices and how their unawareness prevent them from understand the perspectives of their students and their conditions.

Perhaps the biggest finding of this study is the realization that even though I have been colonized in several ways and by my several filters. I now can acknowledge that I have also been capable of engaging in acts of resistance and appropriation that contribute to the re-constructing of English and of Puerto Rican culture. Now that I have gained that awareness, I will pay more attention to my methods to teach English in P.R. as I now wish to engage in emancipatory knowledge construction processes and dialogical teaching which will provide my students with knowledge about the world around them and will offer them better possibilities and opportunities to change them.

These ideas agree with those of Canagarajah (2003) who asserts that it is the minority speakers of English the ones who are transforming English around the world as they appropriate English and infuse it with their local cultures and languages. An example of this can be seen in the way in which Puerto Rican did the same with Spanish as they transformed the language from being a colonial language to the language that become a symbol and marker of Puerto Rican culture. This happened because the language was infused by words and cultures from the three races and cultures that came into contact during the Island’s first colonial encounter with Spain.
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