



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

**THE RE-IMAGINATION OF MUSEUMS: TOWARDS
DECOLONIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS IN
CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a
Master's Degree in Culture Studies, specialization in Management of the
Arts and Culture

By

María Gabriela Sinclair

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

September 2024



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Under the supervision of Prof. Diana Gonçalves

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore decoloniality in contemporary art museums in Central America and the Caribbean. Specifically, to investigate to what extent coloniality is still present in Guatemala and Puerto Rico and how this relates to decolonial efforts in their contemporary art museums. This research is a documentation effort to take decolonial theory created mostly in and by the Global South and see how it is being discussed, practiced and applied in the Global South, particularly, Central America and the Caribbean. By emphasizing the expanding knowledge and investigative endeavors emerging from this area, this research aims to enrich the pluriversality of existing narratives.

The research first reviews existing theory on museums, decoloniality and current decolonial efforts in museums. It then delves into two case studies, which are examined using textual analysis and qualitative research methods such as semi-structured expert interviews to assess the research questions: how is coloniality still present in Guatemala and Puerto Rico? And how does this relate to decolonial efforts in their contemporary art museums? At the end, I will be discussing the findings on the role of community, the reclaiming of silenced narratives and how museums find themselves confronted with a myriad of contradictions when decentering from established norms by coloniality and in the pursuit of genuine commitment to dismantling colonial legacies.

Keywords: museum, decoloniality, Latin America, contemporary visual arts

Resumo

O objetivo desta investigação é explorar a decolonialidade nos museus de arte contemporânea da América Central e das Caraíbas. Especificamente, investigar até que ponto a colonialidade ainda está presente na Guatemala e em Porto Rico e como isso se relaciona com os esforços decoloniais nos seus museus de arte contemporânea. Esta investigação é um esforço de documentação para usar a teoria decolonial criada principalmente no e pelo Sul Global e ver como está a ser discutida, praticada e aplicada no Sul Global, particularmente na América Central e nas Caraíbas. Ao enfatizar o conhecimento e os esforços de investigação que emergem desta área, esta investigação pretende enriquecer a pluriversalidade das narrativas existentes.

A investigação começa por analisar a teoria existente sobre museus, decolonialidade e os actuais esforços decoloniais nos museus. Em seguida, aprofunda dois estudos de caso, que são examinados recorrendo a análise textual e a métodos de investigação qualitativa, como entrevistas semi-estruturadas a especialistas, para avaliar as questões de investigação: como é que a colonialidade ainda está presente na Guatemala e em Porto Rico? E como se relaciona com os esforços decoloniais nos seus museus de arte contemporânea? No final, discutirei as conclusões sobre o papel da comunidade, a recuperação de narrativas silenciadas e a forma como os museus se vêem confrontados com uma miríade de contradições quando se descentram das normas estabelecidas pela colonialidade e na busca de um compromisso genuíno para dismantelar os legados coloniais.

Palavras-chave: museu, decolonialidade, América Latina, artes visuais contemporâneas

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Introduction

What is the first thing that comes to mind when the topic of museums is brought up? For me, thoughts associated with museums were heavily romanticized by how they were presented throughout my childhood and general education. I always considered them larger-than-life institutions or spaces where knowledge and culture were fostered, where the tone for the arts and culture field would be set. This appeared to make sense as the feel of the exhibited artists, their pieces, and the entire narratives constructed around them could only be the result of the collaboration of the great minds of directors, curators, historians, and other cultural producers, who, with their expertise and judgment, determined what was best for the field.

Because I regarded museums as powerhouses of expression and feeling, meant to represent an underlying attitude of the general population, I always felt a deep comfort in being surrounded by magnificent pieces of art covering the walls of a museum. This medium allowed me to travel through time and space; to contact different timelines, from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, to modern and contemporary art. To a great extent, museums kept my curiosity and search for knowledge alive, as I felt I was always learning and discovering new insights into the world around me while I was inside. However, it was also through knowledge-seeking that I came to be well aware that such simplistic narrations cannot paint the entire picture of museums and that, as can be expected, there lies much more nuance and complexity to the topic of museums.

Having a level of reverence towards the museum is a byproduct of how museums built their identity in the Western world. Taking a quick look at the etymology of the word museum it comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word *museion*, which means designated place of study or contemplation, where it is rooted in the Greek word *muse* used to describe the seven muses or daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory (Mignolo 2013). The idea of veneration is not totally alien to the museum space. In their noteworthy article “The Universal Survey Museum”, Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach argue that “the museum has been the most prestigious and authoritative place for seeing original works of art for more than a century. For most people today, in Western society, the very notion of art itself is inconceivable without the museum” (2013, 448). This statement has been brought forward by multiple art historians like Alice Procter, who describes that the museums have “often been compared to shrines, spaces that command a kind of adoration as they construct an atmosphere of reverence around their treasure. Architecturally, they frequently resemble temples we visit to adore and admire artistic relics and the authentic works of

masters. There is a ritual around the experience of museums be quiet and polite, move slowly through dim, cool galleries, and look upon the precious objects to be inspired, but it is a ritual that takes place in a space that is coded as secular” (2021, 56). As I kept trying to understand museums, how they function and how they have managed to represent a “universal” narrative through their collections and exhibitions, I came into contact with concepts that fall inside decolonial studies and culture studies. The awareness that comes from living inside the colonial matrix of power and the understanding of decoloniality, in a way, de-romanticized the idea I had of museums. Decoloniality made me question the normative narratives I have consumed and followed throughout my life and led me to research ways I could unlearn and relearn about museums. It was only a natural progression for me to want to move from mere curiosity to exploring this topic on an academic level.

The concept of decoloniality, of course, is not new. Since the mid-seventies, the idea that we have lived under the effects of colonialism and, therefore, we need to de-colonize has been expressed in several ways and in different disciplinary domains (Mignolo 2007, 450). Decoloniality, in general terms, actively seeks to “stray from the Western canon of thinking and to produce a radical alternative knowledge that takes seriously the epistemic perspective [...] of critical thinkers from the Global South” (Allain Bonilla n.d.). In other words, it creates a critical perspective that considers forgotten realities. When it comes to decoloniality in the context of museums, it is no different. Old museology was mainly interested in the academic study of the contents of museums, whereas new museology has been more interested in the position of the museum as well as museums within society (Hetherington 2013, 2). As Leah Huff explains in her article “Museum Decolonization: Moving Away from Narratives Told by the Oppressors”, the 1980s saw the rise of the new museology that claimed that museum practices were no longer representative of the time and museums needed a “radical assessment” of their role (Huff n.d.). It would mean resisting the “reproduction of colonial taxonomies” as they are bound to imperialism and Eurocentrism (Allain Bonilla n.d.). So, we see the rise of ‘the critical museum,’ new museology’, ‘institutional critique’ or similar variations to the name that involves a sort of critique. The name itself can be misleading since it might be understood as the institution itself doing the criticizing; yet, it is not that. It consists of scholars criticizing institutional policies, and artists questioning the authority of traditional presentations within the so-called temples of culture (Lorente 2017, 115-116). In theory, the critical museum is a shift in judgment, pushing museums

to reconsider the previously understood canon and recreating said canon to provide a new condition (Curtis 107, 129).

Decoloniality has been presented as an option when considering incorporating pluriversality in museum spaces. Decoloniality can be seen as a form of liberation of knowledge where the objective is to transform colonial subjects and subjectivities into decolonial subjects and subjectivities. Decoloniality envisions “delinking (disconnect) to relink (re-connect) with praxis of living, thinking, doing that we, decolonially speaking, want to preserve” (Mignolo 2018, 147). In other words, a decolonial approach, in contrast to other forms of thought, is not meant to replace one hegemonic worldview with another hegemonic view. It is not a way to create a ‘new global order’ that is led by states or other institutions that hold power (in an economic, military, or technological sense) which will only create a dysfunctional system similar to coloniality. Instead, it aims to promote the questioning, rejection and confrontation of such ideals and the pretense of one single reality as the norm/status quo to run the world. It is important to reiterate that decoloniality is an option among options that must fight the urge to fall into totalitarianism. Decoloniality is a diverse, heterogenous, coexisting option that instead of promoting a single totality, defends that the only universality is pluriversality (2010, 223).

My research is set to explore decoloniality in contemporary art museums in Central America and the Caribbean. This research aims to investigate the following questions: how is coloniality still present in Guatemala and Puerto Rico? And how does this relate to their decolonial efforts in their contemporary art spaces and contemporary art museums? Focusing my research on Spanish-speaking countries from Central America and the Caribbean was not a mere afterthought. It was a conscious decision based on several factors. Firstly, the present research (chapter 2 mainly) suggests that the effects of coloniality and the concept of decoloniality have been heavily shaped by the ‘Global South’, more specifically by scholars and activists from Latin America. Throughout the first half of this dissertation, I establish the birth of the museum and its development, explore decoloniality and take decolonial examples from different museums in the Western world to expand on the conversation. However, my goal is not to repeat the information that already exists or explore the same theories about Western museums that have already had a significant amount of work dedicated to them. My goal is to take the existing theory, and especially the theory created in the Global South, and see how it is being talked about, practiced and applied in the Global South, specifically Latin America.

After the decolonization period, art in Latin America has been dominated by the shadow of coloniality. Even if most countries gained their independence, they were still not free from the impacts that the colonial settlers left. According to author Dexter Giannelli, coloniality and the romantization of colonization “dominated the visual vocabulary of artists and artisans [...] where art forms paying tribute to the classical European tradition were hailed supreme by the ruling elite. From architecture to portraiture, non-Eurocentric creative thought and tradition were cast aside in exchange for a style resembling not that of the environment that the works exist in” (n.d.). However, trying to tackle the entirety of the region seemed too broad still. Latin-American not only refers to a geographical region but it also an umbrella term encompassing a multitude of ethnic and racial identities. Even though there is a common thread among countries in Latin America that makes our realities similar to a certain extent, I would be replicating the same colonial narratives if I were to treat Latin America as a monolith, when it is clearly far from that. Taking this into consideration, I settled on Central America and the Caribbean based on geographical proximity, using the case studies on Puerto Rico and Guatemala as a way to showcase that regardless of geographical proximity, we still get two unique cases.

Secondly, the importance of the Caribbean. The Caribbean is fundamental to understanding coloniality and decoloniality. It was the first place where the Spanish colonizers landed in 1492, where the first African slaves bought by the Spanish colonies were brought, and where the indigenous people to the land experienced a genocide at the hands of the colonizers, to name a few historical aspects (Mortari et al., 2023, 145). The dynamics of the colonizers and the colonized were heavily shaped in this region. As Maldonado-Torres explains, the Caribbean became “a laboratory of the types, of forms of domination that were going to make it possible for the colonizers to take the resources of that world and organize them according to their own beliefs” (Mortari et al., 2023, 145). It was also the place that experienced intense decolonization efforts. For example, the first anti-slavery and anti-colonial revolution, which was the Haitian Revolution, even though this specific event is out of the scope of this research, I am using it as a reference to acknowledge the Caribbean’s role in building the various topics covered in this research.

Thirdly, personal experience as someone born and raised in this region. I intentionally highlighted this specific topic and socio-geographical region as a documentation experiment/tool to continue the effort of having records about this region, especially coming from people who were born and raised there, and understand the reality of this region not only from theory but from the

lived experience aspect. In other words, to put a focus on the knowledge production efforts that are happening in this region that are not only relevant to understand the context but to add to the pluriversality of existing narratives. I wanted to add to the creation of bodies of work in the cultural studies field that takes the Western canon thinking out of the equation within the production of knowledge. This research is a contribution to the documentation of the simultaneous existence of multiple frameworks of knowledge that are happening in Central America and the Caribbean. Creating a body of work in the cultural studies field that will take into consideration this specific reality and capture where we stand today and what possibilities lay ahead by pointing out overarching themes of these topics and what paths we can continue to explore.

My ultimate interest in this research is not reaching a set-in-stone conclusion for what decoloniality in contemporary museums is or what it needs to look like. Decoloniality is not a static or fixed concept. It is ever-evolving and will take various shapes and forms as they continue to be explored and developed by different actors. This research is a response to the coloniality we live in. My eventual goal is to continue the efforts of theorizing and shaping the narratives around decoloniality in Latin America.

Methodology and description of chapters

In order to answer my research questions about how coloniality is still present in Guatemala and Puerto Rico and how it relates to the decolonial efforts in their contemporary art spaces and contemporary art museums, I am dividing this research into two sections. The first three chapters will consist of a literature review and analysis of existing theory and chapter 4 will be a deep dive into the chosen case studies. I will be addressing two case studies, which are developed using textual analysis and qualitative research methods such as semi-structured expert interviews to assess the research questions. The first chapter, 1. The Museum, conceptualizes how the museum came to be. Resorting to historical records and the work of scholars who have theorized the museum, I will explain how museums have attempted to legitimize themselves over time. From the museum as, originally, a space for the colonizers to exhibit their ‘conquests’ – many of which were stolen in reality – to the age of enlightenment, where the association with spaces of knowledge was added, until the contemporary art museum, which is a space where, at first glance, one does not see this history reflected: where any sign of time and space is taken away, where we have blank spaces that can be filled with any narrative one wants. But this does not mean that these

spaces do not have their links to that colonial seed. Contemporary museums are still not able to detach part of their discursive proposals from the Eurocentrism and colonialism from which they originate. The fact that it is not obvious or that we cannot see it at first glance does not mean that they are not there. I will be breaking down from the cabinet of curiosities and the exclusive access of the wealthy classes to art to where we are today.

I will then follow up with an overview on the concept of decoloniality in the second chapter, 2. Notes on Decoloniality. I will be drawing mainly from the theoretical formulations of decolonial scholars as a framework to create a critical perspective on decoloniality. I will explain the different terminology employed in this regard and use this chapter as an opportunity to try to lay the groundwork for the different approaches that exist within this theory. And at the end of the chapter, I explain what this has to do with museums and how the museum, as it is structured today, is a sign that coloniality is alive. Looking at each concept separately will serve as a steppingstone to dive deeper into these topics in the following sections.

The third chapter, 3. A Decolonial Approach to Museums, combines the ideas developed in the first two chapters. I investigate how decoloniality has been applied or how decoloniality is seen in museums today from various examples around the Western world (mainly).

After this, in Chapter 4. Case Studies – Borinquen and Cuauhtemallan, two case studies on Puerto Rico and Guatemala are presented. I decided to pick these two countries since they are both opening space for different methods of showcasing art and changing the narratives of the past and present by reconnecting with forms of ancestral knowledge that have been excluded by colonialism and coloniality. Artistic movements from Europe or with heavy inspiration from outside cultures and visual languages became the norm for some time since many artists would study their techniques abroad (Dexter Giannelli n.d). However, this did not stop artists across Central America and the Caribbean from recreating forms of human and emotional representation from their indigenous or Afro-Caribbean heritage that would have been deemed untalented or primitive by the Eurocentric, fine-art elites (Dexter Giannelli n.d). Through decoloniality, artists in Guatemala and Puerto Rico are developing a renewed understanding of alternative ways in which art and museums can live. Instead of continuing the practice established by the dark side of modernity, artists are looking inward to find a voice and a path to convey their own cultural and identity struggles. A space to practice decoloniality by reflecting the diversity of each artist's own story

but most importantly, the continuation of re-imagining and reincorporating symbols of pre-colonial power into the contemporary art of the region (Dexter Giannelli n.d).

Since both of my research questions are interconnected, I cannot talk about decoloniality, especially in the arts, without first acknowledging the effects that colonialism and coloniality have had in Puerto Rico and Guatemala. Based on this, I will present the same approach for each case study. First, I begin by taking a look at how coloniality is still present in the chosen country. This will not only answer the first research question but it will serve as a background to put each country into context to then better understand and develop my second research question. For the second research question, I will then explore the chosen country's art scene and the chosen museum's stand on decoloniality, what they have been doing (or not) to insert decoloniality into the art scene and the museum. All the information retrieved, will be used to discuss my research findings.

1. The Museum

[A] museum is a place we can go to find and tell stories about ourselves and other, it is not the only home for knowledge, but it is one that often holds a national curriculum of identity, preferring the dominant and mainstream narratives. None of these stories is in the museum by accident. Someone has chosen every object on display, categorize it and placed it on a plinth or behind a glass... however invisible they might be, there is someone directing you around the space, shaping the interpretation and choosing what you make look at and how.

—Alice Procter, *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums & Why We Need to Talk about It*

How museums began to build their identity can be traced back to the 15th century, when European countries led the so-called ‘Age of Discoveries’. During this period, the empires set course to ‘explore’ distant places and lands previously unknown to them (Maranda 2021, 182). As the travels continued, the ‘explorers’[colonizers] found that most of the lands they were ‘discovering’ were already inhabited by indigenous populations who had their own culture and social structures set in place; yet, at this point of contact between both is when subjugation began to take hold by the so-called explorers (182). The Europeans did not recognize the ways of living of the indigenous populations. The land and the people living in this land were just seen as an object to conquer for the Crown. An entry in Christopher Columbus’s diary from his first journey to the Americas illustrates this point:

Crean Vuestras Altezas que estas tierras son en tanta cantidad y buenas y fértiles y en especial éstas de esta isla Española, que no hay persona que lo sepa decir, y nadie lo puede creer si no lo viese [...] Ellos [Nativos] no tienen armas, y son todos desnudos y de ningún ingenio en las armas y muy cobardes, que mil no aguardarían tres, y así son buenos para les mandar y les hacer trabajar, sembrar y hacer todo lo otro que fuere menester, y que hagan villas y se enseñen a andar vestidos y a nuestras costumbres. (Las Casas 1942, 91)

The text describes two important aspects: the land and the people. First, Columbus starts by saying that the land in which they had arrived was fertile and good for growing. The second aspect Columbus describes is the Indigenous people. He proceeds to describe them as naked gentles with no wit for arms but who are fit to work on the land. In addition, he describes them as good people to be tamed and taught the European ways (Las Casas 1942, 91). From the outset, Europeans exhibited a sense of superiority. These ‘new lands’ spotted by the ‘explorers’ [colonizers] were perceived as vast and exotic where a variety of uncultivated savages resided (Slotkin 1973, 29).

The ‘explorers’ [colonizers] frequently came back to their home countries with an array of looted material objects, ranging from fauna and flora to clothing and pieces with religious meanings or important significance from the colonies and settlements they took over (182). According to Alice Procter, in her book *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums & Why We Need to Talk about It*, the inception of the museum begins in royal residences and aristocratic homes, where a select group of people, the elite, would be invited to see the pieces collected by those who lived in such places but it was not designed to cater to a large or broader audience (Procter 2021, 15). Essentially, museums started as places where Europe would collect pieces from the non-European world with the intent to put up a spectacle (Mignolo 2013; Bennett 1995, 2).

These first traces of what would eventually become museums took a step forward during the enlightenment period when these spaces began incorporating narratives and characteristics that would lead to cement the idea of the museum as a house of knowledge. They went from only collecting and showing to trying to make sense of said collections. During this period, museums were not only collecting the non-European world, but they were also trying to organize it and give meaning to it. Looking at the importance of scientific visibility and advancements during the Enlightenment period, this added layer to the museums just captures the zeitgeist of the era. According to Bennett, “as the influence of evolutionary thought increased, museums came increasingly to embody or instantiate ideologies of progress which, in enlisting their visitors as ‘progressive subjects’ in the sense of assigning them a place and an identity in relation to the processes of progress’s ongoing advancement, also occluded a true understanding of their relations to the conditions of their social existence” (1995, 179). The museums now added a sort of educational and scientific layer to the exhibitions. It is no longer about showing the wonderful ‘acquisitions’ of these ‘great conquests’, but adding meaning to them with the purpose of educating the general public that was attending these spaces (Procter 2021, 16).

This museum is usually the one that comes to mind when art museums are mentioned. Some examples would be the Louvre Museum in Paris, the Museo del Prado in Madrid and the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (Procter 2021, 16). In the 18th century, the princely art galleries and royal collections all over Europe were absorbed or turned into public institutions, either by royals themselves or their newly founded governments (Duncan and Wallach 1980, 452). The conversion of royal and princely art collections into public museums is closely tied to the historical process

of the time, in which the people in power could use the museum as a channel to institutionalize the claim to speak for the interests of all mankind and secure state power. According to Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach:

Art can be used to realize the transcendent values the state claims to embody. It can make good the state's claim to be the guardian of civilization. It lends credibility to the belief that the state exists at the summit of mankind's highest attainments. In the museum, the visitor is not called upon to identify with the state *per se* but with its highest values. The visitor inherits this spiritual wealth but only on the condition that he lay claim to it in the museum. Thus, the museum is the site of a symbolic transaction between the visitor and the state. In exchange for the state's spiritual wealth, the individual intensifies his attachment to the state. Hence the museum's hegemonic function, the crucial role it can play in the experience of citizenship. (1980, 456)

The first recollections of this educational aspect in museums date back to the 19th century and the Great Exhibitions fairs that were organized across Europe and North America, where the public was not only exposed to the 'trophies' but then added the layer of nationalism and patriotism. It was now the 'trophies of their empire', 'their power', 'their control' (Procter 2021, 60). According to Procter "the content is not presented as a collection *for* the nation so much as a collection *of* the nation, intended to reflect the values of a supposedly united group (2021, 60). Sociologist Tony Bennett expands on this view, characterizing the 19th century as the moment when the museum sheds their previous association of a space to show collections to a select few and becomes a space for 'all', where visitors can identify themselves in this space that upholds the voice of the nation (as quoted by Hetherington 2015, 14).

The role of the collector also becomes even more crucial during this time. Previously, the importance of the role of the collector came from their exclusivity. As Procter points out "[m]ost of the time, these museums were originally created for an in-group, a tight audience that was politically and socially aligned with the collector" (2021, 18). During this period the collection illustrated "the intellectual progress of the civilised man, their sentiments, passions and morals, but also their habits and customs" (Bennett 1995, 174). The collectors would use their status, power and judgement to pick, appropriate and add meaning to the pieces. Nevertheless, the pieces themselves were stripped of their own context and meaning, as well as of the name of the artist or the person who brought it to live life, with it being erased in the process (Procter 2021, 20). Procter also stresses that "the collecting process always involves an element of appropriation: that is to say the act of taking an object out of its context and placing it into a new one. When objects move

and take on new meanings, there is usually a driving design or desire behind it. The object might be used as a focus for aesthetic appreciation or the collectors with to link themselves to the object's history" (2021, 20).

From a Foucauldian perspective, the museum is no more than a discursive space of the outside. According to Kevin Hetherington in his research "Foucault, the Museum and the Diagram", a museum is "a space in which a certain imagining about culture, nature, history and the forces of power associated with their exhibition, emerge through a non-relation to the subject who visits" (2011, 41). Museums are an institution that holds the power to categorize, classify, and order the world into a universal totality in order to crystalize a set of values and symbols in the social imaginary. According to Beth Lord in her research "Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation, and Genealogy" museums are a "function of capitalism and imperialism, and whose power to form individuals is exercised through the careful and ordered deployment of knowledge within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space" (2006, 2). The effort to use museums as a torch of guidance was carried by a select group of people who could produce and disseminate their own narratives, focusing on whiteness and the man as the creators of knowledge (Procter 2021, 104). This idea has also been expanded on by decolonial scholar Walter D. Mignolo, who establishes that presenting collections out of their original space stripped them of their essence and presented simplified narratives of multiple realities. As Mignolo explains in "Enacting the Archives, Decentering the Muses", "the museum could only collect artefacts representative of 'other' memories, but not enact the memories contained in those removed artifacts, displaced from their cultural environment, their owners and authors" (2013).

While it is true that the specific comments on museums by Foucault were limited, his larger body of work can and has been applied to museums extensively. We find it in the form of an epistemic constitution of discourses of knowledge. In line with Foucauldian interpretations, a specific characteristic of the 19th-century museum is that it held the modernist ideal of accumulation, i.e., a "general archive" (Lord 2006, 1). We can also find it in Foucault's later analysis of the operation of power and forms of governmentality (Hetherington 2015, 3-4). In *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), Tony Bennett states that the museum supplanted previous ways of displaying power to the people. The power now came in softer and less coercive techniques "rather than embodying an alien and coercive principle of power which aimed to cow the people into submission, the museum - addressing the people as a public, as citizens - aimed to inveigle the

general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own” (1995, 95). Another scholar who has extensive work around the understanding of the development of the museum is Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, whose Foucauldian influence can be perceived in her intent of knowledge-building around the museum. She theorizes that in this period there is a transition in the form of knowledge, shaped by the ability to measure the order of things (Hetherington 2015, 11).

The museums would develop their own distinctive forms. Through their external architecture, museums maintained a ceremonial air to them. The architecture and design choices not only made them resemble places of worship but also evoked the ancient ceremonial practices of accumulation and display. According to Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, the architecture “organizes the visitor’s experience as a script organizes a performance. Individuals respond in different ways according to their education, culture and class. But the architecture is a given and imposes the same underlying structure on everyone. By following the architectural script, the visitor engages in an activity most accurately described as a ritual” (1980, 449).

The inside appearance of the museums – just like the outside – was also meticulously crafted. In the later decades of the 19th century, the museum used the evolutionary/progressive perspective taken from natural sciences as a way of arranging itself. As Bennett exposes, “the museum, rather than annihilating time, compresses it so as make it both visible and performable. The museum was characterized by its capacity to bring together, within the same space, a number of different times and to arrange them in the form of a path whose direction might be traversed in the course of an afternoon. The museum visits thus functioned and was experienced as a form of organized walking through evolutionary time” (1995, 186). In other words, the museum turned time into a spatial arrangement providing the spectator with a sense of universality in narratives.

1.1 The Contemporary Museum

Even if museums share a starting point, after the Enlightenment they have developed into various categories with their own sets of characteristics. A natural museum and a historical museum would, for example, entail a different use of resources and approaches. For the purpose of this research, I will solely focus on contemporary art museums. At first glance, contemporary art museums seem to be exactly the opposite of the universal survey museums. Throughout the

20th century, museums underwent a process of transformation that responded directly to the social, political and economic changes in their host countries (Cosme 2019, 45). During the mid-20th century, the changes were heavily impacted by World War II and its aftermath, yet the basis of collecting and exhibitions is still pretty tied to the 19th-century ideal. In the 80s, we see the rise of the “*Nouvelle Muséologie*”. New Museology proposes the idea of the museum as a tool accompanying society’s own transformation, placing people and not object at the center (Hauenschild 2022, 73). According to Andrea Hauenschild, New Museology is to be understood and constituted as “practical instruments in an active search for identity by mainly marginalized population groups. A form of cooperation with the community to determine their historical, present and possible future relationship with other socio-cultural groups, which helps to generate identity” (2022, 25). This way, other marginalized narratives that differ from the narratives pushed by modernity are brought forward. One of the aspects that new museology claims is that museums should not stem from a technical, administrative or externally imposed decision but rather from community-driven efforts (26). To preserve character, with a focus on people’s lives, new museology sustains that museums should have a low degree of institutionalization to not hinder their own objectives. This includes the financing of the museums. How the museum is financed affects the degree of influence and control. So, for ‘new’ museums, achieving economic autonomy facilitates the processes of self-governance (26).

Later in the 90s and 2000s, museums saw the rise of ‘globalization’ aided by the internet and the rise of social media. According to Andrea Hauenschild, “inserted in the culture of spectacle and, consequently, the leisure market, the museum was forced to create experiences, beyond merely offering information based on objects” (2022, 46). Museums had to take into account the shifts that were happening with the rise of social media, globalization and this sense of hyper connectedness to create an innovative approach to how visitors could engage with the museum. An example of this would be how institutions now have their own social media profiles and they are actively in the social media sphere or how the curators mount their exhibitions and institutions take into consideration increased photography and video taking by the visitors (Procter 2021, 166).

In terms of display, the inner display in contemporary museums is completely different from its predecessors. The grandiosity and ideals of the museums at their time of inception seem nowhere to be found. The museum has developed its own set of expectations for visual appearance

as well as the type of art it should exhibit and what it should showcase This space is often characterized by an aesthetic that was molded between the late 19th century and mid-20th century and is referred to as the white cube or the flexible white space (Grasskamp n.d.). The white cube often consists of big, minimalist, open spaces, paired with white walls, concrete hall steel frames and a manufactured light source (White Cube n.d.). The artworks usually hang directly in the naked plaster in a single-row and at the viewer's eye level (Grasskamp n.d.). As museums evolved, they shed the decorative elements and spectacle to favor a monochrome utilitarian space (Procter 2021, 163).

Contemporary museums still carry their ceremonial status, though. They just shifted to become the shrines of modernity instead of the shrines of the Enlightenment. According to Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach in *The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis*, the museum still selects and arranges works of art within a sequence of spaces. Organizing the visitors' experience as a script or a performance, imposes the same underlying structure on everyone. And while visitors do not necessarily think of their experience as a ritualistic process, the resemblance of both in form and context is noteworthy (2019, 28-29).

Even though a single unified version of the history of museum displays and the study of the white cubes does not seem to exist, the abovementioned particular elements are consistently found (Klonk 2017, 67). Although they did not originate in the same historical spaces, these phenomena are linked to modernist design ideals from Bauhaus, De Stijl, and other modernist movements and the political realities faced in the West during these periods (Grasskamp n.d.). A few cases worth mentioning that reflect the white cube aesthetic are The Städel in Frankfurt and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where visitors wander through rooms of white walls and asymmetrically installed bay with the occasional wooden bench to provide a moment of brief contemplation of the piece before moving around the sometimes-curved walls of the museum (Klonk 2017, 72). Another landmark, that was banned under Nazi Germany during World War II and later retaken, was the Kunstverein in Hamburg. This space was initially built as an exhibition with a hall with an entirely open floor plan, where partitions could be arranged anew for each show (Klonk 2017, 73).

It is not only about the aesthetics but the ideals embedded into the white cube. The name says is all a flexible white space. The premise of this space was to exhibit works against white walls since it minimized distractions (White Cube n.d.). As art historian Charlotte Klonk states in the essay "Myth and Reality of the White Cube", "the space is neutral in form and color so that an

appropriate background could always be ensured for the oft-changing shows” (2017, 72). Of course, it is important to point out that part of this was a financial decision due to the realities of war and unrest in the first half of the 20th century, with a neutral background designed to enable re-hanging without great expense. However, it was also about portraying the modernist ideal of change and progress. A blank canvas where the viewer can visualize the changing and dynamic artistic style that is emerging, and because it could be filled as desired, this type of space is supposed to give no sense of time or geography (Procter 2021, 163). Contemporary art museums are meant to be seen as a space that can be reframed and reformed.

The contemporary museum really embodies the Western modernist ideals of progression and betterment. This can be reflected in the globalization of contemporary museums where we now see traveling exhibitions and biennales, exchanges and residences and the clear rise of the role of the internet and social media. It all creates a sense that we are interconnected and sends a clear message about how museums are capable of reinventing themselves as needed to supposedly hold space for all. Globalization has been portrayed as a naturally occurring process that intends to ‘bring together countries and people of the world’ as a consequence of living in a world that progresses and betters itself. Yet, globalization, as part of modernity/coloniality, is an ideological project that looks to legitimize the power dynamics of coloniality (Davis 2018, 2). As Benajmin Davis explains in “Globalization/Coloniality: A Decolonial Definition and Diagnosis”, “globalization is not merely a process of change to which all are subjected, but a proposed and planned project that affects subjects differentially, like that project of modernity, such that, just as modernity should be written ‘modernity/coloniality’, so too should globalization be written ‘globalization/coloniality’” (2018, 3).

This is in part why it is common to see contemporary museums as places where artists and curators are retelling, reframing and reclaiming their stories through social art, yet still being considered performative. Note that it is not just the artist or curator’s work being categorized as performative, but the museum itself giving it a space. Social art, also known as participatory art, is art that focuses on community relations, politics and inequalities, and very deliberately collective work (Procter 2021, 164). These projects that combine art with elements of experience seem to be penetrating through the exclusionary politics that museum spaces have historically shown by showcasing exhibitions that challenge that (Procter 2021, 163). These efforts to create a pluriversality in narratives for contemporary museums fall short since contemporary museums are

still heavily rooted in coloniality: just because there is not a crystal-clear link to its past history, it does not mean it is not there.

The first aspect to take into consideration is the financial engine behind the façade. Museums nowadays are still heavily “shaped and financed by industrialists who have profited in the wake of colonialism” (Procter 2021, 162). This generational wealth was built as a consequence of colonialism from nations that used to have colonies and that, until this day, are still influenced by and benefitting from these imperialist notions (Procter 2021, 162). The owners are no longer ‘explorers’ or ‘navigators’ but the descendants of either through blood connections or generational wealth, but museums are still heavily dependent on those corporate sponsorships and wealthy donors (Puar and Ross 2021). An illustration of this is the Tate Galleries in England. In 1889, the industrialist Henry Tate, who made his fortune through the sugar industry, offered his 19th century art collection to the state and funded the first Tate Gallery that would open its doors to the public a few years later in 1897 (Tate n.d.-a). Tate himself was reportedly not a slave-owner or slave-trader, yet his history does connect to British colonial slavery (Tate 2019). According to a statement released by the Tate Galleries in 2019, the sugar industry on which Tate built his business in the 19th century “was itself absolutely constructed on the foundation of slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries, both in supply and in demand. Without slavery, the British sugar industry and the wider Atlantic sugar industry would not have existed in the form and on the scale, they did” (Tate 2019). Even after the end of Britain’s slave economy, Britain’s sugar continued to come mainly from estates that were established under slavery in the Caribbean and South America. As the statement continues, “British labor practices implemented in the second half of the 19th century and most of the 20th century, contributed to the progressive under-development and impoverishment of the Caribbean” (Tate 2019). In addition to the more obvious claims were certain pieces in Tate’s collection that were associated with individuals who were either slave-owners or whose wealth came directly from slavery (Tate 2019).

This leads me to circle back to the political discursiveness of the museum. As Tony Bennett theorizes in his seminal work *The Birth of the Museum*”, there is “a tension within this space of representation between the apparent universality of the subject and object of knowledge (man) which it constructs, and the always socially partial and particular ways in which this universality is realized and embodied in museum displays” (1995, 7). Nevertheless, Bennett continues to

suggest that it is this same tension that has allowed for the appearance of contemporary museum practices oriented towards representation of different groups and realities (7).

Foucault's panopticon can be used to explain this tension in contemporary museums. On the one hand, the discursive guidelines from the enlightenment. The enlightenment ideals that the benevolence of the museum has to reach all the population and even affirming that it is an inalienable right that all people in society have a right to access culture; but under the universality idea where the museum sets the pace to what is culture (Bennett 1995, 8). On the other hand, the contemporary idea that museums that there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within the collecting, exhibition and conservation activities of museums, and the demand that the members of all social groups are to have equal right of access to museums no longer under the universalist claim (9).

A recent example of this was palpable when the International Council of Museums (ICOM) established a new definition for museums (Maranda 2021, 182). According to ICOM's most recent definition, a museum is "a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing" (ICOM). This definition was established on the 24th of August 2022 and it came to replace the previous one used for years by ICOM, which similarly defined museums as a "non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (The Extraordinary 2019). Upon first reading these two statements, it may seem that only a few minor alterations were made. However, it is only after researching the process undertaken by ICOM to reach these agreed definitions, that the subtle differences become all the more distinct.

Reaching some sort of agreement on the wording of the definition of a museum has taken many years of thought and effort. The timeframe involved in attaining this kind of agreement and the hints of polemic over the wording came to reveal a vast amount about the current status and role of museums. In 2016, a committee was entrusted by ICOM with the task of researching and assessing whether the current definition of museums required updating (Marshall 2020). This

undertaking resulted in tumultuous back and forth among council members. By 2019, a lengthy definition covering a range of topics was proposed, which included statements such as “democratizing, inclusive, and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures” and “to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing”, but ended up being rejected by 70% of the delegates and tilted as a controversial and politically charged definition (Liu 2022). What was clear among council members was that there was an evident call from some to recognize that museums needed to be in line with the times and that they would need to be involved in the political and social realities of the world. Museums would be required to progress past the idea that they were just places to expose pieces. Although this new push towards more ‘modern’ values existed, there remained a predominant call to prevent the definition of museums from getting into such topics, as they did not consider them to be a part of the fundamentals of the museums, but rather a political play and a void effort to be with the times (Marshall 2020). Fundamentally, there were many in the council that felt that these newly proposed assertions were not relevant in explaining the function of a museum (Marshall 2020).

The museum lives between the contradiction of the museum’s universal aspirations and inherent limitations of any specific exhibit, which can often be seen as biased, selective, and falling short of the museum’s overarching aspirations (Bennet 1995, 102-103). In summary, the museum is yet another space of power and control characterized by the ongoing tension between the establishment of “truths” within discursive and non-discursive contexts. Within this realm, the museum is a battleground where stories can be made, unmade and remade, all depending on how we look at things and who is in charge of the conversation (Heatherington 2015, 208).

2. Notes on Decoloniality

“The existence of the museum is, itself, a colonizing fact. The very structure and what it embodies is perhaps the epitome and certainly one of the most readily observable symbolic remnants from the age of ‘active’ colonialism”

—Lynn Maranda “Decolonization within the Museum”

I finished the last chapter bringing forward the contradictions faced by museums. For contemporary museums, a key aspect should be to deliberately engage with the contradictions they face, rather than passively conforming to established norms. This entails a concerted effort to reimagine the museum’s framework. Generating new connections between the museum, its exhibitions, and the people who come to see it to create a space that works better for everyone is where decoloniality comes into play. In this chapter, I will shortly turn the focus away from museums to touch on decoloniality, as well as on related terminology such as decolonization, colonization, postcoloniality and coloniality. Since I already briefly brought up some of them in the previous chapter, I will continue to bring them up as I document decoloniality as an option applied to museums in Central America and the Caribbean.

Colonization and coloniality, and on the other hand decolonization, postcoloniality and decoloniality are terms that are often used interchangeably when talking about this topic. Colonization and decolonization are usually the go-to words to encompass all aspects of colonization and decolonization but also cover aspects of coloniality and decoloniality (Walsh 2018, 49). To some extent, I can understand why the concepts are conflated. The talk around these concepts is vast and ever-growing, with a lot of layers to peel back. In academia, these concepts are still being defined and there is no consensus on them so far. Some might look into this as a great weakness: how do we get to talk about a topic without the ‘correct’ terminology? To some extent, this is a valid point. Language matters, words being one of the main tools we have to define our realities. However, being in the midst of the construction of such concepts also provides us with a space for inventiveness, curiosity, and research. Decoloniality keeps defining itself as it keeps living. It is actually very fitting for this to be the reality because one of the aims of decoloniality is to reach a pluriverse of ideas. Even with the differences in the field, I have found a common denominator, a unifying thread among all: challenge, transformation, liberation. As sociologist Gurminder K. Bhambra writes in “Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues”, “these

arguments are unified by the challenge they pose to the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe” (2014, 115).

An interesting point that I found in researching the best approach to define these concepts comes from the notes of Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh. In their conceptualization of these terms, it can be inferred that colonization, as well as decolonization, seems to belong to or to be bound to a specific time and space. It concretely defines what happened at a moment in history, which is different from coloniality and decoloniality, which are ongoing conditions that we still experience today (Walsh 2018, 100). There is an undeniable link between them, yet highlighting the differences is what brings clarity to how I will be using these terms throughout my research.

Coloniality is a transdisciplinary approach that emerged in the Global South, specifically South America, between the 1960s and the 1980s (Mignolo 2018, 111). Coloniality moves beyond specific disciplines or interdisciplinary approaches to also add the layer of the ‘lived experiences’ of the people in the Global South. This mixture creates a new conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approach to address coloniality. As Mignolo captures in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis*, what brought about the concept of coloniality was “an intent to reveal a hidden side of history” (2018, 112). And what is that issue or hidden side of history one may ask? It is the other side of modernism. As such, we can deduce that coloniality’s main goal is to shed light on the darker side of modernity, and by doing so we can also understand that coloniality emerges as an essential/fundamental part of modernism and not a product/afterthought of it (111).

Before I carry on with the other concepts, I believe this is the perfect moment to clarify two aspects. Firstly, coloniality is a consequence of decolonial thinking, and decolonial thinking came into being through the concept of coloniality. For all these reasons, coloniality is already a decolonial concept: thinking decolonially made it possible to see coloniality and seeing coloniality materialized decolonial thinking (Mignolo 2018, 112-113). Second, modernity seen through the lenses of coloniality (as described by Mignolo and under the inspiration of Anibal Quijano) shows half of the story. This is the half that “has been conceived in one line of time, universal time and universal history” (117). In other words, a Eurocentric approach where modernity assumes that all parts of the world were going through the same time periods as Europe when such is not the case. In addition to this self-centered narrative, this approach also assumed that everyone should adopt modernity. An example of this can be that the rhetoric of modernity made us believe that

Indigenous and non-Europeans needed European standards, sets of beliefs, norms, science, and ways of thinking to become “civilized and developed” (118).

The exact moment modernity was used as the zeitgeist of Western civilization is not completely clear, but it can be traced back to the Renaissance (Mignolo 2018, 118). For some scholars and historians, the ‘birth’ of modernity was during the European Enlightenment, while some others claim that it was as early as the European Renaissance, since the idea in itself was a rebirth or change in time implying that Europe was ready to move forward (119). Moreover, at some point, modernity was thought to be in contradiction with tradition, when both are modern concepts. According to Mignolo, “As modernity was construed by means of fictional narratives in which modernity itself is the main character, the word names a historical period and a set of norms that defines socio-economic organization as well as particular subjects and subjectivities. Fiction becomes reality. In these narratives, tradition is construed as a period preceding the advent of modernity. In these narratives, coloniality is always absent and therefore ‘tradition’ materializes the hidden logic of coloniality, which is how the rhetoric of modernity operates (118). Through the logic of coloniality, tradition appears to have been invented by modernity. Even though there have been critiques of modernity, such as the Postmodernity movement, these movements and critiques came from or within Europe (e.g., the Postmodernist movement was born in France, the same place Modernity was born) and they still carried a linear storytelling (119).

The term colonization was introduced around 1886 and it is defined as the system of colonial rule (Mignolo 2018, 116). According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which provides a more detailed definition, colonialism is addressed as a “practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people [by] another. Colonialism usually involved a group of people that arrived to a new territory and upon arrival lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin” (116). In other words, colonialism can be seen as a systemic exploitation to take advantage of/profit from people, their lands and their resources.

Decolonial scholar Ramón Grosfoguel explains in an interview with Angélica Montes Montoya and Hugo Busso that, indeed, colonization is when one group exercises political, economic, and cultural dominance and exploitation over another group but the key differentiator is how colonization predates coloniality. It predates the establishment of the contemporary capitalist/patriarchal/colonial world-system that emerged with the European colonial expansion in 1492 (Montes Montoya and Busso 2007, 2). Colonialism is the articulation on the inferiority of

the conquered people and the superiority of the conqueror. However, coloniality does not end there. As Grosfoguel continues to elucidate the differences, he explains how coloniality refers to a pattern of power that began with the European colonial expansion from 1492 onwards and “where the notion of race and the global ethnic-racial hierarchy crosses all existing social relations, such as sexuality, gender, knowledge, social class, the international division of labor, epistemology, spirituality, etc.”, this pattern of power continues beyond colonialism (2).

Decolonization can be seen as a process of undoing colonialism. As Mignolo explains decolonization “originally meant freeing a colony to allow it to become self-governing or independent” (2018, 121). He proceeds to quote that decolonization is also the “process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country. Decolonization was gradual and peaceful for some [...] colonies [...] but violent for others” (120). This attempt at defining decolonization can be seen as vague as it fails to detail not only who or what was carrying out this act of decolonization, but also what the process itself entailed, among other specificities. Nevertheless, today, it can be assumed that the agents of decolonization were not the colonizers themselves – ending colonialism from the goodness of their hearts. Instead, it was the people who experienced oppression under the colonists, whose lands were exploited for the benefit of the colonists and the empires they served, that led their own efforts of decolonization (121-122).

The word decolonization was established around 1945 after World War II. Since then, decolonization began to be applied to describe historical occurrences that do not necessarily fit the definition (Mignolo 2018, 123). For example, taking a look at history books, most nations underwent some sort of process that could potentially fall into the decolonization category. However, it will not make sense to amalgamate these events under this one term because they were not the same and did not occur under the same circumstances. As Walter Mignolo explains, “homogenizing them [the waves of decolonization in the global south with the European ones] in this way, the differences and entanglements between imperial and colonial historical lineages are confused. Once a distinction is made, the separate lineages of imperialism and colonialism can come to light” (122-123). This can be seen in the revolutions and independence struggle in the Americas and the Caribbean (considered to be the first wave of decolonization) carried out by Creole/Mestizo actors of European descent and actors that were of African descent, and some African themselves. The struggles that Africa and Asia also had to wrestle with (considered to be the second wave of decolonization) have a different trajectory to the independence and revolution

struggles in Europe. (123). The homogenization of events is also in part what gave place to a concept that could mark these differences.

The need to create a different concept also came as a result of what happened after the decolonization of the Global South. The first and second waves of decolonization had a common objective of creating a nation-state after independence. Even though they managed to establish a nation-state, they both responded to the same colonial logic since the local elites who replaced the colonizers still clung to and perpetuated the same structures of privilege and institutions of exploitation (Tsang 2021). The external revolutions and independence efforts of colonies that were in direct control of Europe turned into internal colonialism, where the elites and new leaders who were building these new nation-states were using the script of the European idea of modernity (Mignolo 2018, 122-123). We can see that the first wave of decolonization matched and ran parallel to the imperial changes of Europe where the rhetoric of modernity was based on progress and civilization. The rhetoric for the second wave of decolonization matched the imperial changes based on development and modernization (124).

Decoloniality arose as a way to try and cover the limitations found in decolonization. Decoloniality after its mutation from decolonization seeks to understand the consequence of colonialism and the persistence of coloniality nowadays. As Anibal Quijano recalls, “Europe has built itself and identity through a process of differentiation from other cultures. Yet there is little reflection within European social and political thought on how those other cultures constitute the ground of European self-realization” (Bhambra 2014, 118). Decoloniality searches for a ‘a praxis of living’ that delinks from the dark side of modernity. This praxis consists in a constant undoing and redoing until we find a sustainable way to live rather than be a hostage of the modernity’s desires imposed by Europe” (120). In the words of Catherine Walsh, decoloniality can be explained as “a perspective, stance, and proposition of thought, analysis, sensing, making, doing, feeling, and being that is actional (in the Fanonian sense), praxistical, and continuing” (2018, 100). However, it is crucial to understand that decoloniality does not mean and is not meant to replace one ‘universal truth’ with another ‘universal truth’. Decoloniality recognizes pluriversality, the existence of various realities that are somehow interconnected. Nevertheless, decoloniality is a work in progress, not a finished project. According to decolonial scholar Maldonado-Torres, decoloniality is “an incomplete yet rooted project that represents a turning point for subjects and

communities. Where we do not see ourselves as problems, but as agents of change that can overcome the limits of colonial logic” (Mortari et al., 2023, 145; my translation).

Postcoloniality is also a term often used in this realm. Postcoloniality emerged as an intellectual movement in the late 1970s and it is largely based on the ideas of Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said and his seminal book *Orientalism* from 1978 (Tsang 2021). Orientalism opened the door to question the production of knowledge especially in the studies of the Orient/Occident, where there is the elimination of the other (Orient) in the production of knowledge. This becomes only the product of the Occident and their action upon others, thus justifying the Occident’s material domination of the ‘other’ (Orient) (Bhabra 2014, 116). As Edward Said himself describes in his book, “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (2003, 33). Postcolonialism poses a challenge to the dominant conceptual frameworks of Europe and suggests the need to consider the role of colonialism, the empire and slavery in the emergence of the modern world (Bhabra 2014, 116). postcolonialism theory suggest that is should serve as an attempt to interrupt the Western discourses of modernity since it is not only about changing the narratives or pointing out the West role in forming said narratives but also finding a way to transform how we live (116).

The difference between decoloniality and postcoloniality centers around academic disciplines. Even though postcolonial studies address the same issues around the political, economic, social, cultural, and historical impact of European colonialism, it remains in the realm of the cultural (115). Differently, decoloniality expands into world-systems theory and critical social theory. Another difference between the two is the geographical and time aspects. Postcolonialism has its roots in the work of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia and refers mainly to the 19th and 20th centuries. As Said point out in *Orientalism (1978)*, to speak on this topic, is to mainly (not exclusively though) refer to British and French impact on India and the Levant (2003, 34). On the other hand, Decoloniality is rooted in the work of diasporic scholars from Latin America and starts from the 15th century onwards, matching the time the Europeans arrived in Native lands on the American continent (115). It is also relevant to point here that postcolonialism (without the hyphen) is not a designation of time, meaning it does not refer to the period of transition after colonies got their independence (Tsang 2021). The general consensus in interpretation is that post-colonialism (with the hyphen) does refer to that specific time period after colonialism while postcoloniality is the understanding that what happens after independence

is a result of the continuous effects of structures and institutions imposed during colonialism (Tsang 2021). In general, postcoloniality and decoloniality can be seen as different perspectives on the same issue. It is how a specific part of the world interacts with their imperial interlocutors mainly Europe and the West in this scenario (Bhabra 2014, 115).

2.1 Breaking Down the Colonial Matrix of Power

Under the conception of Anibal Quijano, coloniality is short for coloniality of power. This concept is a substitute for ‘patrón colonial de poder’ or, as translated to English by scholar Walter D. Mignolo, “colonial matrix of power” or “CMP” for short (2018, 141). The colonial matrix of power aims to “undercover the domains that the discourse of modernity produces in order to advance its overall project” (142). It does not mean to disregard the achievements of modernity but to uncover the hidden half of modernity that has not been addressed. The discourse of European modernity promised a betterment of society through conversion (to Christianity), civilization (the civilized individuals) development (a call to move forward) and market democracy (142).

The best way to answer the question of how the colonial matrix of power manages to hold all of these domains is through a series of levels. On the outermost level, we find the level of knowledge and it is composed of actors, languages, and institutions (143). The actors can be seen as people in positions of power such as politicians, CEOs of large banks and corporations, presidents and directors of universities and museums. The institutions referred to are centers of knowledge such as universities, foundations, religious centers and organizations, research centers and museums. The languages refer to the European imperial languages in which the conversation has been established, maintained, and regulated starting with Spanish, Portuguese and Italian during the Renaissance, and French, English and German since the Enlightenment period (143-144). For other individuals, entities, or states, whose native languages are not any of the mentioned above, to enter the conversation they need to do so in one of the above-mentioned languages. However, the reverse does not hold.

The domain of knowledge occupies a privileged position which makes it essential for the colonial matrix of power. According to Mignolo, knowledge:

occupies the level of the enunciated, where the content of the conversation is established, and it occupies the level of enunciation, which regulates the terms of the conversation. A pedagogical

metaphor would help clarify the point I am making here. Think of a puppeteer: you do not see the puppeteer (the enunciator); you only see the puppets (the enunciated). You are drawn by the puppets, by their movements and dialogues. What you see and hear is the content of the conversation. In order to “see” the terms of the conversation, you would have to disengage from the illusion and focus on the puppeteer behind the scenes, who is regulating the terms of the conversation. Knowledge in the cmp occupies two positions: knowledge is one of the puppets (one domain, and the domains are the content of the conversation, the enunciated), and knowledge also refers to the designs (the enunciation) that the puppeteer creates to enchant the audience. Coloniality of knowledge is enacted in that zone in which what you see and hear from the puppets that enchant you distracts you from the tricks and designs of the enunciator. Decoloniality of knowledge demands changing the terms of the conversation and making visible the tricks and the designs of the puppeteer: it aims at altering the principles and assumptions of knowledge creation, transformation, and dissemination. Dewesternization, by contrast, disputes the content of the conversation. It aims to change the puppets and the content of their conversation, not the terms. It disputes the place of the puppeteer not to replace it but to coexist next to the existing puppeteer. (2018, 144-145)

The analogy I am quoting above makes it clear that all levels of the colonial matrix of power are interconnected, even though at first sight that is not apparent. Knowledge seems to be separated from politics, for example, but with a decolonial lens these two cannot be separated. A decolonial analysis of the colonial matrix of power aims to reveal these interlinked connections of modernity. The quote above mentions two important terms: decoloniality and dewesternization. As I have been exploring, the colonial matrix of power is a complex structure of domains and levels that are kept in motion by domination/exploitation/conflict. Domination is established by the rhetoric of modernity that fuels exploitation legitimized by coloniality and ends up giving rise to conflict and conflict triggers a response. Some of the responses for domination/exploitation/conflict are dewesternization and decoloniality. Dewesternization calls into question the control and management of the colonial matrix of power, but it does not go deeper as to interrogate the existence of CMP as decoloniality does (Mignolo 2018, 146).

Civilizations placing themselves as the center of the world is not an uncommon occurrence. We have witnessed it extensively throughout history. That is not the critique made by scholars on this subject (coloniality/decoloniality). The problem arises when one civilization tries to homogenize, design, and redesign the entire world while placing one civilization not only as the center but also the model that everyone should emulate. That is, essentially, what Eurocentrism has done. Europe, which can be defined as a geohistorical territory, has measured non-European civilizations through their European lens and framework, clearly placing themselves – i.e., their culture, religions, scientific endeavors, cartography, geography, knowledge and values – as the superior and desirable goal all civilizations should look up to and strive for. As Mignolo explains,

“Eurocentrism is an epistemic phenomenon that refers to the enunciation, the flows, and the domains constituting *cmp as if the* domains were mirrors of the world and the enunciations/enunciators the site where ‘true representation’ of the world takes place” (2018, 194). It is not that all non-European countries become European, it is that non-European countries have had their narratives and ways of living disturbed by narratives set by the colonial matrix of power (221).

2.2 The Option of Decoloniality

Decoloniality has been proposed as a way out of the colonial matrix of power. Since the CMP encompasses every layer of society, there need to be ways to combat each one of them. When the option of decoloniality is brought forward, it is to reimagine how we can live. As Ramón Grosfoguel expands in a recent interview, the world-system is a “heterarchical system of power” and, in order to dismantle this system, also referred to as the colonial matrix of power, simplistic notions should be left behind since there is not a simple and singular solution (Montes Montoya and Busso 2007, 5-6).

An illustration of this can be seen in the level of knowledge which belongs to the outermost level of the colonial matrix of power. Institutions that have a knowledge or education component to them are already aligned with the logic of coloniality (Smith 2020, 12). In the academic realm, for example, the West’s monopolization of the academic curriculum and pedagogy reminds us that the academy, particularly the humanities, has been almost entirely in the hands of the ones who benefit from coloniality: white people — specifically, white men (During 2021, 4). In this case, decolonial theory assists in examining these institutions and their Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy rooted in the logic of coloniality (Fúnez-Flores 2023, 3). Decoloniality in academic institutions might start by questioning: ‘Who’s teaching? What are we teaching? How’s it being taught to? Under which frameworks? Who’s in the room? Who isn’t?’. And it grows into pushing the institutions to be transparent about their policies and protocols and uphold equality (Smith 2020, 18). Yet, questioning is not enough, as the point of decoloniality is to go deeper until the roots of coloniality are taken out and decoloniality is able to rebuild the foundations of “equitability, transparency, accountability, and social justice, creating cultures that are brimming with care, criticality, curiosity, and invention” (24). In decoloniality, the framework has to change.

It cannot stay on superficial levels, changing the curriculum but leaving the colonial foundation the same. The superficial changes that are often framed as ‘representation’ are mere performative acts if they do not come accompanied by structural changes.

Another component of the level of knowledge is art and museums. I already talked about how framing museums as places of knowledge was crucial to building and consolidating the Western identity. In trying to conceptualize what decolonial art is, there is the birth of decolonial aiesthesia. Decolonial aiesthesia is a decolonial tool that can be used when delinking art practices from the colonial matrix of power. This concept, mainly framed by scholars Rolando Vazquez and Walter D. Mignolo, aims to break with the modern/colonial concept of aestheticism. Aiesthesis is used instead of the word “aesthetics” because the latter was the concept developed in modernity as a form of regulation of the beautiful, the sublime, the senses and the perception of the world through Eurocentric categories of thought and notions of aesthetics (Vazquez and Barrera Contreras 2016). According to an interview carried out by Barrera Contreras with Rolando Vazquez, “Eurocentered modernity establishes aesthetics to control subjectivities and forms of perception of the world. Therefore, when speaking of how we decolonize modern-colonial aesthetics, we prefer not to use the modern term ‘aesthetics’ but to speak of ‘aiesthesia’ in order to emphasize the liberation of the senses and the ways of perceiving the world in the face of a system of regulation” (2016 n.p.). In other words, aesthetics is the regulation of feeling, of what is beautiful, and our sensorial relation to the world through the modern/colonial, while aiesthesia would be a liberation from that control imposed by the colonial matrix of power to discover and experience a plurality of forms of the beautiful, of the sublime, of perception of the world (2016 n.p.). Aesthetics has put great emphasis on the visual and turning the visual into a central form of power that allows modern/coloniality to control the representation and perception of the world. In that sense, decolonial aiesthesia comes to challenge this. It comes to delimit this vision of the world that arises from modern/coloniality and to rescue what modernity/coloniality has silenced and suppressed under its power, which is other realities, other ways of understanding the world, other ways of living (2016 n.p.).

3. A Decolonial Approach to Contemporary Museums

“It’s not just about inviting indigenous and other marginalized people into the museum to help the institution improve its exhibitions; it’s an overhauling the entire system. Otherwise, museums are merely replicating systems of colonialism, exploiting people of color for their emotional and intellectual labor within their institutions without a corollary in respect and power.”

—Elisa Shoenberger, “What does it mean to decolonize a museum?”

When thinking about the potential prospect of decoloniality of museums, a lot of questions and points come into mind, with each answer provided hosting its own set of new questions. It is safe to say that thinking about a decolonial approach to museums is not new and I am certainly not going to be the first or last to try make sense of this complex subject. I used the first and second chapter of this research to set a background, provide some context, and create a space to explore the concept of the museum and the concept of decoloniality. Even if both concepts cannot be fully covered due their extensiveness. The idea behind the previous chapters was to provide some relevant and important information to then allow a better understanding of each concept and, hence, serve as a foundation for the discussion of the coming chapters.

As mentioned before, there is a relationship between museums and coloniality. As I briefly went over in chapter one, museums are a mark of colonization as their inception dates back to the colonizers’ ‘ages of discovery’ and the exhibition of their looted items (Maranda 2021, 187). Not only do museums date back to colonization but they have persisted under coloniality. Museums are one of the pieces that comprise the level of knowledge, which is known as the outermost level of the colonial matrix of power as explained in the second chapter of this dissertation (Mignolo 2018, 143). In other words, the very existence of museums can be understood to serve the expansion of coloniality, which is very present today even if colonialism is considered ‘long gone’ or ‘a thing of the past’.

The acknowledgment and questioning of the connection between museums and coloniality have led to the possibility of decoloniality entering the museum space. A more recent example of this would be the exhibition at Museo Jumex in Mexico City. Jumex had an exhibition called *Memories of Underdevelopment: Art and the Decolonial Turn in Latin America, 1960-1985* which

shines a light on artists across Latin America who, during these years, created a decolonial cultural history (Haddad and Chilewich 2018). It examines various movements in artistic production that emerged in the 60s and 70s and how the artists took them to trace regional history. These artworks articulated a response to oppressive states of poverty and the authoritarian political regimes that assumed power throughout Latin America. How the underdevelopment in our region is partly due to the remnants of modernity and its world system that far from eradicating the problems experienced in the region, maintain and perpetuate these issues (Haddad and Chilewich 2018). This exhibition is a look into Latin America's contemporary art history from a decolonial lens.

Nevertheless, decoloniality in museums is not an approach that has been received with open arms in every single instance. Bringing forward a concept that questions the establishment and a system that at its core has remained unchanged for centuries can be uncomfortable and it can make some key players defensive. According to authors Ariese and Wróblewska, "for the controlling group, for whom the norm feels normal, decentering may feel like a deliberate attack" (2022, 52). An example of vocal opposition that recently ran through social media was the statements made by UK Culture Secretary, Michelle Donelan, who, in an interview with BBC Radio 4, compared restituting the Parthenon Sculptures to "opening a can of worms" and "dangerous road to go down" because it can be the door through which the entire contents of museums are questioned (Razzall 2023). Yet, with these types of critiques, it is clear that there is a lack of deep understanding of decoloniality. Decoloniality in museums is about a shift in norm but not about replacing the current hegemony with another one. It is about increasing perspectives and questioning which narratives and norms a museum wants to cement and strengthen (Ariese and Wróblewska 2022, 52).

In the contemporary museum scene, the discourse of decoloniality has been quite different from other types of museums. Coloniality and colonialism are harder to perceive in contemporary museums because these spaces do not have the characteristics of a universal survey museum, for example, so the discourse has to go beyond what meets the eye (Procter 2021, 163). Here is where I want to explore the various proposals that have already been suggested and implemented during contemporary times. I also need to point out that the discussion around museums is changing and what might be applicable today might not be tomorrow or in any future period. Furthermore, it is important to note that the points and examples I am going to be talking about do not and cannot represent a comprehensive list. They should be read as some of the approaches taken in museum

decoloniality. Colonialism and coloniality affected/affect marginalized communities in different ways, so a one size fits all approach cannot be established.

3.1 Restitution of Looted Art

Let us start with the most widely talked about proposal suggested as a way to achieve decoloniality in museums: restitution of looted art. The fascination for looted art and restitution has given this field the spotlight for several decades. It is not only a topic that concerns historians, anthropologists, and other scholars who have an interest in the field, to provide a few examples, but also states, actors in positions of power, criminals and the public in general (Gaudenzi and Swenson 2017, 492). Both words, looting and restitution, belong to a larger semantic field but, overall, looted often refers to the forceful appropriation of objects commonly as a result of wars and riots and restitution often refers to the action of giving back something to its owner or reparation for loss or damage (498). However, it is important to point out that in the general discussion about this topic, there is little agreement on the terms because of the circumstances in which looting and restitution have happened and how they have acquired different meanings or uses in different periods and contexts (498). In addition, to complicate the situation further, the knowledge of how the terms have evolved largely revolves around usage in Europe (499). For example, during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, looting and restitution were connected to the concepts of barbarism and civilization. In relation to this, authors Gaudenzi and Swenson, in “Looted Art and Restitution in the Twentieth Century – towards a Global Perspective”, explain that “the seizure of art by the revolutionary armies was legitimized by the idea that only free men could love and preserve art therefore - so the argument went - all art should be freed from tyrannical feudal lords and find its home in France, be ‘repatriated’ to the homeland of free men. It was thus an act of ‘looting’ that was also first designated an act of ‘restitution’” (499).

The sense of restitution as return of the annexed goods came after the defeat of Napoleon and it became more prominent after the Holocaust, as well as the need to expand on the term reparation as used in the Versailles Treaty. Moreover, during the 19th and 20th centuries, a more prevalent link between art and politics emerged, making negotiations of looted art as a change that expressed a yearning to get back what had been lost from the side of the people who suffered the looting, as well as the yearning to come to terms and move forward from the past for countries

who committed the looting (499-500). Regardless of the different context, Gaudenzi and Swenson conclude that “it is generally assumed that looting constituted a sometimes criticized but ultimately accepted common practice throughout antiquity and up to the early modern world” (502).

The analysis of looted art and restitution is not straightforward, as it also comes with complex historical, geographical, socio-political, economic, and transnational implications. Some explore it through the role of international organizations, others from a commercial lens/for commercial interest, and others through a political lens (495). It involves arguments that range from legal framework to faith, morality, preservation, and nationalism (499). In addition, it is important to keep in mind that situations in which looting occurred(s) were (are) not solely in Europe or the West; it is a phenomenon that has a global scale (502). As Christa Roodt states in “Restitution of Art and Cultural Objects and its Limits”, “the art market, consists in a ‘myriad, often over-lapping, subspecialties that may be limited by region (for instance, Asian or North-American), by date (mediaeval, contemporary), by medium (paper, bronze), or by form (paintings, furniture) ... and archaeological and ethnographic materials ... [which] their countries of origin consider cultural heritage” (2013, 206). However, for the matters of this specific research, I am going to be focusing on Western countries.

Overall, the literature available on this topic mostly comprises the Napoleonic period, the Second World War and its aftermath. Gaudenzi and Swenson explain that: “Despite these gaps in knowledge, we are often presented with a relatively linear chronology of looting and restitution, where the question of global connections is often only implicitly analyzed according to a diffusionist model as spreading from the ancient Mediterranean to medieval and modern Europe, with most emphasis on Napoleonic and Nazi lootings” (2017, 502). In other words, the spread of the studies has been uneven with a major focus on Nazi looting and the aftermath of World War II (494). It should not be downplayed that looting occurred during this horrific period in history but it should be stressed that the prevalence of studies in certain periods and national contexts is not only the preoccupation of the field but reveals an interesting point: “the entanglement of identity politics and research as well as the importance given to nation in both legal and discursive framework” (494). Even if the field of restitution has focused on certain timeframes more than others, and colonial restitution remained largely untouched for several decades, there still have been significant efforts to connect looted art to colonialism and postcolonialism (501). The

restitution of looted art in the realm of decolonization and decoloniality of museums definitely plays an important role in the discussion.

The looting of art and cultural objects served as a tool to expand the imperial objectives of establishing national unity. The looted objects that were exposed at fairs, palaces and, what we now know as museums, constituted the ‘prizes’ claimed by the Empire for having expanded its power over ‘new’ and ‘previously unexplored’ territories. It fuels a sense of pride in belonging to a nation that displays such power. I need to point out that this falls under the settler colonialism and not the commercial colonialism. Dan Hicks makes reference to this particular distinction made by Achille Mbembe that explains how colonialism had a commercial/trade aspect and a settler colonialism aspect. The commercial aspect only had the monetary objective of enriching the Empire whereas the settler colonialism had the conception that the settlements were an extension of the nation (2020, 151). Nevertheless, as one side built its national identity by attaching partial meaning (of what the objects originally meant) or complete new meanings (stripping them down to just ‘prizes’/nationalism) to the looted objects, another culture loses its cultural identity. The art and cultural objects looted usually came with a subjective importance, as art is not necessarily valued the same across the globe. What is valuable to one might not be to the next individual or group. Nevertheless, art and cultural objects produce and reproduce cultural identity. According to Christa Roodt, “What a community or group recognizes as part of its identity and as representative of its symbolic continuity beyond its contingent existence, helps to identify that group” (291-292). In other words, it can be stated that these objects are linked to the human need for roots and that these objects should be respected and protected.

In 2023, Cambodian classical dancer and choreographer Sophiline Cheam-Shapiro wrote an article titled “Met Museum Kicked Me Out for Praying to My Ancestral Gods” where she details her first-hand experience with the erasure of the meaning and essence of looted pieces. Cheam-Shapiro was reportedly asked by the security team of the MET museum to stop dancing in front of a statue and to put her shoes back on (Cheam-Shapiro 2023). However, she was not barefoot at the museum just to dance and cause disruption, in fact she was performing a ritual prayer dance to a statue representing God Harihara. For many Cambodians, it is a common belief that spirits can inhabit objects and that they can be found in religious statues and nature like trees, rivers, and mountains (Cheam-Shapiro 2023). Cambodian classical dance, considered an intangible treasure of humanity by UNESCO since 2008, emulates how kings communicated with the heavens to

make supplication for rain to the harvest. Even though this form of ritual prayer has gained new meaning, in its core, it remains a sacred practice. Classical dance has even more significance since around 90% of its practitioners perished during Pol Pot's genocide that went from 1975 to 1979 (Cheam-Shapiro 2023). Cheam-Shapiro belongs to the first generation to study and perform after such a horrific event, so when she travels around the world and visits museums that have these pieces, she prays to the God and ancestors that live in them. It is her tradition and an essential part of her identity and artistic practice (Cheam-Shapiro 2023). She was stopped from acting out the very purpose for which these stolen statues were created.

This story brings me to my next point, which I have seen debated about in looted art. It is the conception that these objects are better in museum than in their countries of origin. The colonial idea suggests that states with an extensive history of colonialism and imperialism know how to care for, manage and do in these situations better than countries where these pieces were looted from. This has been suggested to be the prime reason why countries demand restitution; the looted sacred pieces surely cannot belong in places that cannot understand or honor their essence, regardless of whether the pieces are extensively studied or whether the history and significance of the pieces are acknowledged. Using the previous story as an example, Cambodia wants restitution of its sacred statues. Cambodians claim that they are the ones that should define how these pieces should be displayed, taken care of and interacted with. When returned, Cambodians can incorporate them back to their routines and if someone aims to learn more about them or wants to see them then they are welcome to go to Cambodia and experience them in their original form (Cheam-Shapiro 2023).

Another ongoing case, which dates back almost 220 years, is about the Parthenon Marbles that reside in the British Museum. Also known as the 'Elgin marbles', due to British aristocrat Lord Elgin, who in the 1800s extracted from Greece a collection of antiques – including statues of Greek gods that once decorated the Parthenon in Athens – and 'brought' them to England (Marshall 2023). It is important to note that the 'acquisition' of the Parthenon Marbles is not like the Benin Bronzes or other artifacts, where there is no doubt that they were looted (Omer 2023). Elgin claimed that these pieces were acquired legally, argument that the British Museum supports (The British Museum n.d). However, this statement around their acquisition by Elgin remains heavily disputed and it still brings into question ownership, legitimacy and preservation (Omer 2023).

The main dispute on the acquisition is the lack of proof to back such statements. Dr. Tom Flynn argues that “the actual circumstances under which Lord Elgin removed the Marbles, the legality of Britain’s acquisition of them will always be in doubt. More importantly, the fact that permission to remove them was granted not by the Greeks but by the Ottoman forces occupying Greece at that time undermines the legitimacy of Elgin’s actions and thus by extension Britain’s ownership” (2019). This case is extensive, so I will not dive into all the intricacies of it. However, the reason for raising this case is because there are specific arguments used by the British Museum in this so-called ‘debate’ that further illustrate my point of the colonial mindset that resists returning looted object to their countries of origin. One of the British Museum’s arguments is that the Parthenon Marbles are better presented among their global collection because they aid in the storytelling of the human civilization (Marshall 2023). The British Museum’s website claims that the sculptures display a “full picture” in the Museum (The British Museum n.d). This circles back to the question of who should get permission to tell the story and who gets to decide what stories are told and how. As always, it is also important to point out that this is not a universal scenario, since there are instances where the desire to get back stolen cultural property is not a priority or concern for the people and communities whose pieces were looted from. There is the case of the Rai Coast people in Papua New Guinea who decided to forego claims because “they regarded their cultural material as being more productive in circulation than when returned (Roodt 2013, 301). Nevertheless, if I looked at it through a decolonial lens, the power to make such decisions should reside in the countries and communities who legitimately own the pieces and not the other way around.

Restitution comes with its own limitations. We should not think about restitution as the only path towards decoloniality in museums or assume that because there are restitution efforts it means we ‘achieved’ decoloniality. It also does not mean that institutions engaging in these efforts are necessarily concerned with decoloniality. One of the main criticisms that restitution of looted art receives is that the institutions use it as an excuse to not address their own structural issues and how they uphold colonial values. This brings me to what Ruth B. Phillips posed some years ago when she questioned if museums have become places where “symbolic restitution is made for the injustices of the colonial era in lieu of more concrete forms of social, economic and political redress?” (Maranda 2021, 188). Moreover, we need to consider that restitution targets, for the most part, certain types of museums since not all museums own, collect or show looted pieces. As we

can see in contemporary art museums. The returning of looted art should be considered as a starting point (one of several) and not the end.

3.2 Changes in Narratives

The questions and limitations found in the restitution of looted art have fueled the exploration of other approaches that museums can take toward decoloniality. Especially because this approach is not really applicable in contemporary art museums. One point that I found while exploring the restitution side is that a lot of the questions on ownership, legitimacy, provenance, and preservation, circle back to history and how history is told. The stories we tell play a huge role in how we perceive things and it is worth taking a closer look at them. Revisiting history and how it has been thought sparks this so-called change in narrative. As Alice Procter mentions in her book, “you have to know your history to understand how to challenge its legacy” (Procter 2021, 19).

Winners get to write history, or so they say so, when there is a single prevalent narrative. Untold stories and gaps exist that may or may not be filled with inaccurate information and biases. Every story has two or more sides. As Alice Procter states in her book *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums & Why We Need to Talk About It* “anyone who calls themselves an explorer is an invader to someone else – someone is always paying for the gilding and relentless progressing. And when a specific cultural moment is given this much prominence, and turned into a cradle of civilization, it is always at the expense of other regions, histories, communities” (Procter 2021, 10). In other words, one person’s hero is considered to be another’s oppressor, and the museums should shed light on this duality instead of ignoring and disregarding it. In addition, there is increasing pressure from external actors of museums, either artists, activists, curators, cultural producers, scholars or people in general to acknowledge and implement this duality. As Maranda explains “... [people] will no longer accept being marginalized or shut out of the museum sphere. They now demand equal access to museum collections and the right to interpret these through their own eyes” (2021, 188).

Museums are not just a mere space to showcase art collections. Museums, through their collections and the sense they try to make of them as well as the historical narratives they push forward, shape identity, memory, and most importantly, the narrative. As previously established, these individual pieces or sets of pieces cannot represent complete or entire stories. Instead, they

provide a small window into the history and story behind them. Museums pushing certain narratives, without providing the full picture, or telling one-sided stories are disregarding centuries of systematic violence, which has taken different forms and has been reinforced over time under modernity, which these museums stand on. Of course, ignoring or disregarding this makes it easier to maintain the status quo and not make significant changes to the museums' structure. Decoloniality in narratives not only explains from different perspective(s) what has happened and how we got where we are today but, as Dan Hicks writes in the preface of *The British Museum*, it sheds light on the “degradation and fatigue of institutional constructions, their structural weaknesses and collapse” (2020, xii). By dismantling façades, we can facilitate conversation in order to lead to a wider narrative.

A change in narrative opens the path for increased transparency. When transparency comes into mind, it is normal to want to link it to looted objects because of (the lack of) transparency from museums on how they acquired their pieces and disputes in provenance and so on. Totally valid and crucial. But for this section, I will be talking about transparency as a need and overall benefit of practicing a change in narrative. As Csilla E. Ariese and Magdalena Wróblewska argue, being open about the colonial past and how coloniality affects current museum practices led to “authorship (of exhibitions or texts), decision-making processes (relating to the museum program and hiring policy), and the power relations within the institution (including funding dependencies). These issues have been addressed over the last few years by museum professionals as well as social activists” (2022, 82). Furthermore, this effort does not even need to be undertaken by museums alone but in partnership with specialized provenance researchers, historians, and overall, the community that can aid to paint a better picture at all levels. An example presented in the book *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples* which elucidates this is how the Victoria and Albert and the Tropenmuseum, rather than undertaking these relabeling projects in isolation, are approaching them within the broader context of programs that lead to the recontextualization of the histories of objects and collections (Ariese and Wróblewska 2022, 83).

However, aiming for a change in narratives also carries its own limitations. It is important to note that a decolonial approach is not only about being represented. It is crucial to be critical when museums claim their commitment to ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’, or ‘decoloniality’ (Hicks 2020, 19). Because decoloniality is a complex set of ideas, it cannot be achieved when a museum, for example, gives space to a few black artists or women artists, acknowledges that these museums

play the role they play, or holds a few talks with curators, cultural producers and scholars on decoloniality. Yes, that is a step but “decoloniality is a complex set of ideas – it requires complex processes, space, money, and time, otherwise it runs the risk of becoming another buzzword, like ‘diversity’” (Hicks 2020, 19).

3.3 Other Important Aspects to Practicing Decoloniality in Museums

Decoloniality in the museum involves creating visibility within the museum. As we already know, museums have their own axiological dimensions, so what they present through (a) collection(s), in theory, carries value or a meaningful insight. Still, this can only be grasped in context, meaning that the collection makes sense through how it has been displayed, classified, and what background or information is provided. The decisions as to what is visible need to be taken a priori by the museum staff, curators, producers, and so on. As Csilla E. Ariese and Magdalena Wróblewska state in their book *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples*, “the decision to make things visible or invisible in museums is always related to power” (2022, 21). Creating visibility through a decolonial lens implies questioning who or what is given visibility in these spaces and making changes to what has been made visible and why, and the way the collections are displayed and addressed (22).

Decoloniality in the museum requires vulnerability. I already mentioned earlier how the current questioning of museums and their role can stir their foundations, leaving museums in a vulnerable position. At first glance, it might not seem as the optimal state to be in since it can translate as being in an exposed position to getting attacked or judged. Nevertheless, vulnerability should not be taken in a negative form. I believe it can be seen as an opportunity to transform perceptions and as an essential part of practicing decoloniality in museums. However, this vulnerability requires openness and letting their defense down to confront whatever uncomfortable mistakes, emotions, failures that arise from self-reflection but also from the exterior voices (Ariese and Wróblewska 2022, 98). In this context, the voices come from museum visitors, interested communities, and social activist groups. Museums can meet these voices in a defensive manner or with openness, which can ultimately result in a positive impact on the museum. The defensiveness is one of the reasons people like me are here researching and writing about this topic still. Museums can choose the position they want, yet not embracing the positive that this moment of change can bring can lead to museums losing their relevancy (98). As Csilla E. Ariese and Magdalena

Wróblewska mention, “If museums want to continue to have a place, they must stop seeing activists as antagonists. They must position themselves as learning communities, not impenetrable centers of self-validating authority. If they do not, museums run the risk of becoming culturally irrelevant” (99).

4. Case Studies – Borinquen and Cuauhtemallan

*Lo que me pertenece a mí
Se lo quedan ellos
Que se vayan ellos.
Esta es mi playa
Este es mi sol
Esta es mi tierra*

—Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, “El Apagón”

This chapter explores my research question concerning decoloniality in contemporary art museums in Central America and the Caribbean. Specifically, it intends to question and investigate how coloniality is still present in Guatemala and Puerto Rico and how this relates to decolonial efforts in their contemporary art spaces and museums. As outlined in the methodology section in the introduction, my research questions are interconnected and intended to inform each other. I will begin by addressing my first research question, analyzing the selected country to demonstrate the ongoing presence of coloniality. Subsequently, I will explore the concept of decoloniality within the context of the art scene and museum practices to answer the second research question. The information gathered will be used to discuss and interpret the research findings.

4.1 Borinquen

Communities throughout Latin America have had different experiences with colonialism, yet Puerto Rico’s case is very particular. Several historical moments and one natural disaster have completely changed the history of Borinquen¹ and informed its fight for decoloniality: the aftermath of the Spanish colonization in 1493, the aftermath of the Spanish-American war in 1898 and Hurricane Maria in 2017. In 1492, Christopher Columbus’s faulty calculations to reach the Silk Road, which was situated in India and parts of East Asia, led his ships into the Caribbean where, upon arrival, the Spanish claimed the land. They massacred, enslaved, and forced the religious conversion of the Taíno indigenous people and other African, and Asian populations that were forcefully brought to or arrived on the island over the next 500 years (Soto 2018).

¹ Borinquen, Boriquén or Borikén is the Taíno name for Puerto Rico (Taíno is the language of the Taíno people which are the Indigenous people of the Caribbean).

Fast forward to December of 1898, when the signing of the Treaty of Paris put an end to Spanish rule on the island of Puerto Rico and in the rest of Spain's possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific region (Annex A).² Under the Treaty of Paris, the Spanish ceded ownership of Puerto Rico to the United States and Puerto Rico officially became the "Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico" which translated into English as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or the Free-Associated State of Puerto Rico (Soto 2018). The status of the island as an "American territory" has always been blurry. Puerto Ricans don't have the same rights as US Nationals to vote for the President of the United States or representation in Congress (Soto 2018), but the US rule is omniscient. The President and Congress have complete power over the country and may veto any law produced in the country. Puerto Rico could be sold or ceded at any time because United States have that power (Annex A). This has been seen as a point of great contention, being regarded as the ultimate factor that has led Puerto Rico to its current state.

Another very important aspect is Puerto Rico's proclivity to natural disasters due to its geographical position. In 2017, the island was hit by a category 4 hurricane that quickly became the worst natural disaster of the past century (Varas-Díaz et al. 2020, 3). It had terrible consequences; most notably the destruction of homes and other infrastructure, transportation and communication systems; it resulted in the country experiencing the longest electricity and water system outage ever; and it is estimated that Hurricane Maria caused around USD 90 billion in damages to the island (Kennicott 2023).

Hurricane Maria represented a huge turning point for Puerto Rico. According to Nelson Varas-Díaz, at the time of the disaster, "the local radio stations would constantly mention how a veil was lifted from the eyes of the people who lived in the island and how they could now see clearer the ever" (2020, 3). What exactly could they see? Varas-Díaz poses that Puerto Ricans could see the clear effects colonialism and coloniality have had in their lives. The social and economic crises in Puerto Rico are linked to its colonial status, which originated much further back in time and were exacerbated by the hurricane (2020, 3). This particular point was emphasized during the interview I conducted in 2023 with Professor Carlos Rivera from William and Mary University: "I have to start by making the disclaimer that despite being born and raised there, I was not in Puerto Rico during Hurricane Maria. My parents were there and the house I grew up in was completely destroyed, but it is very important to establish that I was not there because there

² Annex A. Carlos Rivera, Interview by author, September 14, 2023.

is an element of lived experience that one has to account for in these situations. I have lived through other hurricanes but by not going through the collective trauma caused by Maria, I can only put myself in a position of looking at it from a distance. Although I can confidently state that the disaster caused by the hurricane was not so natural” (Annex A; my translation).

The hurricane accelerated the disaster Puerto Rico had been living through. Firstly, it is generally safe to say that due to many years of infrastructure neglect by both the United States and Puerto Rican governments, the impact that this hurricane imparted on the land was far greater than what it could have been if appropriate and timely maintenance had been carried out. Ever since the departure of la Marina de Vieques, the United States lost interest in Puerto Rico as an important military point (Annex A). Puerto Rico had a history of being regarded as 'the key to the Americas' until the United States started looking towards Europe and elsewhere for their strategies. Unfortunately for the already disadvantaged Puerto Ricans, this translated into disinvestment (Annex A).

Secondly, Puerto Rico’s economy has been restrained by the United States, which has resulted in billions of dollars of external debt and high rates of unemployment causing 43% of the population to be in poverty as of January 2023 (Kennicott 2023). In 2016, Puerto Rico declared itself bankrupt. Since Puerto Rico is not recognized as a State, it cannot borrow money from international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and technically it cannot even declare bankruptcy (Annex A). Puerto Rico found itself in a terrible limbo. The government of Puerto Rico could not pay the debt and most of the entities owed were from the United States. This is where PROMESA came into the picture. PROMESA came as the fiscal oversight board appointed by the US government. It is important to mention that Puerto Ricans did not and could not vote for this board, yet PROMESA was given the last word on any law produced in Puerto Rico that has to do with or has budget implications (Annex A). Since the fiscal board came into existence, there has been a series of cuts and austerity regimes. Professor Carlos Rivera adds that Puerto Rico was living through a precarious moment of neo-colonialism (colonization through the economy), “a moment of huge disinterest by the US, our inability to go internationally to ask for help because ‘we are not a recognized State’, then a category 4 hurricane that caught everyone off guard comes along. We lost everything. There was no drinking water and we spent **months** without electricity. Nothing was working and the response from the U.S. did not come until almost two weeks after the disaster” (Annex A; my translation). In other words, amidst years of economic

recession and a debilitated infrastructure, dealing with the aftermath of a natural disaster was the straw that broke the camel's back. According to Ameya A. Lele, due to the unclear nature of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, "the federal government intrudes upon Puerto Rico's affairs only when convenient" (2020, 726). This indifference or lack of action in addition to bureaucracy and corruption on the island have slowed and hindered efforts to reconstruct and repair the damages caused by the hurricane. Ameya A. Lele adds that "Puerto Ricans [were] left in limbo, fending for themselves with limited resources in an effort to bring normalcy back to the island. Reconstruction is barely moving, with government red tape and corruption derailing efforts and keeping funds away from community rebuilding projects" (716).

Despite these situations, Puerto Rico has been relying on the "régimen de la economía del visitante" or visitor's economy to sustain its economy. Franchised as a Caribbean tourist destination, Puerto Rico's government has relied its economic development upon foreign investment in the city as a way to allegedly improve the quality of life of Puerto Ricans and help maintain infrastructures like highway networks, utilities, communication networks and other essential services (Foundation for Puerto Rico n.d.). However, these efforts have been highly questioned and criticized by the residents of the island for their numerous negative effects and because this solution is not aligned with the people's best interests. This topic has been developed extensively by independent journalist Bianca Graulau, whose work rose to prominence in social media platforms like TikTok, and more recently in 2022, when she was granted by Puerto Rican reggaetón artist Bad Bunny a space to develop a short documentary called *Aquí Vive Gente* (Martínez 2022). Translated into English as "People Live Here", this 22-minute documentary dives into the issues Puerto Rico have been facing due to the visitor's economy.

In the documentary, Graulau interviews a series of people who have been affected by the displacements caused by the visitor's economy. Locals who have rented their houses for ages are being displaced by their landlords. The landlords are issuing 30-day evacuation notices to later sell the houses, apartments and plots of land to foreign investment that will gentrify and transform these houses into hotels, resorts, luxury houses, or similar. Later, the new owners will significantly increase their rent prices to the point where locals can no longer afford to stay because they cannot meet the new demands (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). This is being facilitated by the government which has created laws like Ley 22, which gives tax incentives or relief to foreigners if they come and invest in Puerto Rico. As of July 2022, around 3000 people were benefiting from

this law, especially people from the United States (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). With the devastating effects of Hurricane Maria, the government spotted an opportunity to offer local land on a silver platter to foreigners so that they could come and ‘invest’ in Puerto Rico and rebuild what was destroyed by the natural disaster. Foreigners could come, buy the plots of land and turn those places into tourist spots with the promise of creating jobs for locals and reviving the zones in ‘dire’ conditions (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). This is not only happening in areas around the city center but also areas close to the beach. Beaches in Puerto Rico are of public access, yet the creation of luxury houses and resorts that completely block the easy entrances to the beach makes it almost impossible for residents to access if they are not house owners or guests at these resorts (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). As a result, Puerto Ricans are left feeling outcasted in their own country.

In the documentary, the situation of Puerto Rico’s visitor’s economy is compared to the plantation economy. The US invasion of Puerto Rico at the end of the 19th century allowed the US sugar companies to take over the land. They hired Puerto Ricans as their employees and paid them minimum wages that kept them in poverty (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). Juxtaposed to today’s situation, Puerto Rico is under US rule, and people from the United States are incentivized to buy properties in Puerto Rico to turn them into tourist rentals with the promise of employment for the local population (Graulau and Martínez Ocasio 2022). The result is a foreign owner cornering the profits and locals gaining minimum wage. This is not to say that Puerto Ricans are against development, but they contest the terms of how the government and rich people are doing it. The visitor’s economy reflects a contemporary interpretation of the same colonial mindset that has historically shaped the Caribbean. While the format may have changed, the essence remains the same. Instead of plantation economy, there is now an open invitation for foreigners to exploit local land and labor at minimal cost.

However, despite all, the aftermath of Hurricane Maria could be seen as a catalyst that helped foster a deeper sense of community in Puerto Rico. The aftermath of Hurricane Maria prompted the mobilization around issues the island has been experiencing around healthcare, energy independence, food sovereignty and alternative community water systems for years but where worsen by the hurricane. This can be seen as a continuation of political resistance to the colonial and capitalist policies that benefit profit and corporations instead of the people and environmental

preservation of Puerto Rico, something activists have been fighting for on the island since at least the 1960s (Pérez González and Viera Salgado 2021).

Hurricane Maria came to make these issues more apparent for the people. According to Nelson Varas-Díaz, “this colonial experience seems unending, spanning fifteenth-century colonialism under Spain, and the ongoing colonial experience with the United States. The Island and its people experience coloniality in the form of US control over its borders, laws and economy, the lack of citizens’ representation in political forums, disparities in federal programmes and the denial of the right to vote in US federal elections” (2020,3-4). This reminds me of when Anibal Quijano theorized that Latin America would feel the effects of colonialism a long time after it gained independence, and for Puerto Rico that is a true statement. In fact, Puerto Rico still sees colonialism in action. If we take Puerto Rican scholar Ramón Grosfoguel’s definition of colonialism, he states that it is related to a group of people who exercises political, economic and cultural domination and exploitation over other people (Montes Montoya and Busso 2007, 2). Puerto Rico has been stripped of its sovereignty by another group of people using political and military domination of its territory and population through the presence of a colonial administration. So now, in a life post-Hurricane Maria, decolonial efforts in Puerto Rico have increased in order to fight the colonialism and coloniality they experience in everyday life.

4.1.2 Decoloniality in the Contemporary Art Spaces and Museums

The role of Puerto Rico’s art community has been crucial in the visibility and continuation of decolonial efforts amid social, economic and political issues, most notably post-Hurricane. Puerto Rico has used art as a medium to treat the subject of colonization and coloniality. Nowadays, there is a growing network of contemporary artists who, through a myriad of styles, themes and philosophies are engaging in with decoloniality and blurring lines between artistic practices and other pressing issues (Soto 2018). By questioning traditional museum practices, revisiting art history, and incorporating diverse decolonial perspectives, Puerto Ricans are working towards decoloniality in art spaces.

Hurricane Maria was a traumatic experience so everyone somehow had something to express afterwards. Especially because it brought back this recurring contradiction experienced by Puerto Ricans of being “American”. On the one hand, Puerto Rican citizens have their American citizenship, but on the other hand that American citizenship does not come with all the rights. In

this particular case, this American citizenship was supposed to translate into urgent aid after the hurricane but it did not happen. Puerto Rico was limited to receiving aid from one country, their colonizer, the United States. And the help did not come in time. That contradiction had to be expressed somehow, and contemporary art came out as a catharsis, but also as a way of trying to manage those contradictions (Annex A).

The earliest exhibition to come out as a response to what happened was showcased at Embajada, an art gallery located in San Juan, Puerto Rico, run by partners Christopher Rivera and Manuela Paz (Dafoe 2022). They recently purchased a new building for their gallery, which they mark as a kind of political gesture for reclaiming land and fighting visitor's economy. As I went over earlier, Puerto Rico passed a law that granted tax exemptions to new residents in 2012 to "incentivize growing companies and investors to settle on the Caribbean Island, creating jobs and boosting the local economy in the process" (Dafoe 2022). However, that was far from how it turned out to be. What this resulted in was in a law incentivizing wealthy foreigners, developers and investors to come to Puerto Rico seeking for a tax haven and in turn skyrocketing the cost of living, thus adding to the already extensive list of problems the island suffers from (Dafoe 2022). For Manuela and Christopher, owning property is a way to fight gentrification, which keeps displacing people from their houses and turning them into tourist attractions (Dafoe 2022). This exhibition had pieces that shone light on the handful of situations that Puerto Rico went through before and after the Hurricane. There were pieces from artists like Gabriella Torres-Ferrer titled *Untitled (Valora tu mentira americana)*, which translates to "Value your American lie" (Annex A). In the piece, one can appreciate a wooden electric lamppost that was completely destroyed by the passing of the Hurricane. The lamppost has a state propaganda poster fixed that read:

"VALORA TU CIUDADANÍA AMERICANA

GARANTÍZALA.

VOTA ESTADIDAD

11 DE JUNIO"³

³ A visual reference of this artwork can be retrieved [here](#). This piece was also exhibited in "no existe un mundo poshuracán" at the Whitney Museum.

The sign “*Value your American citizenship, guarantee it, vote statehood*” refers to the referendum on the political status of Puerto Rico that was held 3 months before Hurricane Maria on June 11, 2017. The referendum was to vote among the following options: become an official state of the United States, independence or maintain the current status of Puerto Rico as a Free-Associated State (Whitney Museum of American Art n.d.). This highlights the contradictions Puerto Ricans are facing in this situation – where perceived protections that American citizenship is meant to grant Puerto Ricans contrasts the ongoing neglect and colonial status by the United States (Annex A; Whitney Museum of American Art n.d.).

Another featured artist is Daniel Lind-Ramos, who has been working for 40 years on Afro-Puerto Rican themes. After the Hurricane, Daniel used it to portray different perspectives of the same event (Annex A). *Maria-Maria* is a piece that first sees hurricanes from ancestral knowledge. “Huracan” is a word with a Taino origin and it references these atmospheric phenomena (Annex A). The second perspective is the representation of the goddess Guavansex, the Taino goddess of storms. Afro-Puerto Rican and indigenous knowledge have in them the capacity to handle the complexity of the contradiction, where we see, simultaneously, Maria as the feminine divinity, Maria as the destroyer, and Maria as the one who renews (Annex A). This exhibition was featured in Puerto Rico a few months after the Hurricane took place. Without power from the electrical grid, the use of electric generators was paramount to running the exhibition. This highlights the urgency people felt to express themselves, to handle the contradiction, and to work through the collective trauma (Annex A).

In the first wave of exhibitions that happened in Puerto Rico, one can see artists trying to make the Puerto Rican situation as visible as possible, commenting on the colonialism of disaster and climate change as a direct result of colonial history. Furthermore, it could be seen that these phenomena are a direct reaction to capitalism, in the sense that, as Mignolo theorizes, coloniality creates systems like capitalism (Mignolo 2018, 233). In a time when a vast number of artists were making decolonial comments through their art, it was the fuse that served to ignite the explosion of the summer of 2019, which was when the Puerto Ricans went to the streets and made the governor of Puerto Rico resign. This was the first time in its history that something of this caliber happened on the island. It is also worth noting that this was the governor who was present when Hurricane Maria arrived. Ricardo Rosello was quickly thrust into the limelight, so much so that on social media one could see the hashtag #RickyRenuncia everywhere (Annex A). There were

several efforts to shed light on the decolonial narratives using art as a medium, but in the beginning, they were not institutionalized initiatives.

Another effort carried out in Puerto Rico was the development of decolonial cartography. Born during the Covid-19 pandemic, Memoria (De)colonial is a collective of investigators, activists, cultural producers, and educators using a decolonial and antiracist lens to explore colonial legacies in Puerto Rico (“Memoria Decolonial” n.d.). Memoria (De)colonial works in several cultural projects using participatory methodologies. One of them is the “The (De)commemorative Landscape”, which is a cartographic representation of colonial and decolonial public art in Puerto Rico (“Memoria Decolonial” n.d.). The map, with its captions, is easily accessible through their website. The captions are divided into types of commemoration and themes. The type of commemoration indicates with an icon if the site is a monument, school, building, historical landmark, mural, town square or even if it is related to a sport. The type of commemoration icon will have a color, which identifies the theme of the place that can be related to Spain and Christianity, Mestizaje,⁴ Taino and indigeneity, Blackness, US Imperialism, War, or a place with local relevance. Memoria (De)colonial also urges everyone to submit a site that might not currently be in the map (“Memoria Decolonial” n.d.). In addition to the cartographical map, Memoria (De)colonial carries out a critical walking tour through the Old San Juan area of Puerto Rico. Desvio or (De)Tour is meant to be a history and architectural walking tour aimed at unmasking or demystifying heritage sites through a decolonial lens (“Memoria Decolonial” n.d.).

Eventually, institutions like the Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Puerto Rico (MAC) and other contemporary museums got exhibitions in the United States. The Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States surpasses the amount of Puerto Ricans who currently live on the island (Annex A), which explains why exhibitions with a focus on these topics were showcased around the United States – not only from a population standpoint but from a sociopolitical standpoint as well. One of the first exhibitions in the United States was at 516 ARTS Contemporary Art Museum in New Mexico. Opening in 2018, “Puerto Rico: Defying Darkness” was an exhibition complimented by a series of public programs that showcased the sense of urgency people felt about expressing the years of the economic crisis and climate disasters that colonialism and colonality had left and how artists were in a constant state of negotiating their role inside these issues (516 ARTS n.d.). In

⁴ Mestizaje refers to the racial mixing between European and indigenous non-European ancestry during the time of Spanish colonization.

regard to these first exhibitions in the United States, Professor Carlos Rivera points out that these first institutional exhibitions were not in large traditionally ran contemporary museums, they were held in small spaces or ‘distant museums’, distant in a literal sense of distance from Puerto Rico, distant in a sense where the population of Puerto Ricans and the Puerto Rican issues were seen as a minority (Annex A). Nevertheless, these actions by MAC and Museo de las Americas in Puerto Rico and 516 Arts in the United States were the spark that later would get attention from institutions like the Whitney.

The exhibition titled “*no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria*” at the Whitney Museum, which coincided with the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Maria, represents certain milestones for Puerto Rican decolonial efforts.⁵ Firstly, it is a space for Puerto Rican artists to explore and present how their practice has transformed in these five years. The Hurricane serves as the bridge where lives pre- and post-Hurricane meet and can address a larger context. According to Philip Kennicott, “the aftermath of the storm was further exacerbated by the chain of events that preceded and followed this (un)natural disaster, including the austerity measures implemented by the PROMESA law (also known as La Junta); the deaths of 4,645 Puerto Ricans as a consequence of the Hurricane; the protests during the Verano del 19 (Summer of 2019) that led to the ouster of governor Ricardo Rosselló; the string of earthquakes; the COVID-19 pandemic; and much more” (2023). Moreover, according to the curatorial text of “*no existe un mundo poshuracán*”, this exhibition seeks what other politicians, scholars and key actors have failed to accomplish: to put Puerto Rico and its people on the map of dignity and belonging (Whitney Museum of American Art n.d.). Secondly, the place it was held in. This is the “first scholarly exhibition focused on Puerto Rican art to be organized by a large U.S. Museum in nearly half a century” (Whitney Museum of American Art n.d.). Even if this exhibition came 5 years after the disaster, it is incredibly meaningful to have an exhibition of this magnitude in the US since it can be interpreted as a spotlight on US ground to the century-long occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States. An occupation that has had “extracted wealth from the territory, undermined its ability to develop a self-sufficient economy and piled mountains of debt” (Kennicott 2023). Lastly, acknowledging the role played by the curator in charge of this exhibition, curator Marcela Guerrero started her role at Whitney when the Hurricane had just hit the island in 2017, becoming the first Puerto Rican to be a curator of Whitney and the first curator at Whitney specializing in Latin-

⁵ For visual a reference, see the [exhibition page](#) of the Whitney Museum.

American art (Pogrebin 2023). According to a recent interview, Guerrero expressed that un “*no existe un mundo poshuracán*” is in part a result of her own will to use her platform and help bring light to the reality they were experiencing (Pogrebin 2023).

One of the museums that caught my attention during my research was the Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Puerto Rico (MAC). Established in 1984, MAC is a hybrid museum that came alive when local artists and cultural producers felt an urgency to create an alternate model for exhibiting contemporary art in Puerto Rico (MAC Educa n.d.). The museum is dedicated to the “collection, preservation, study and promotion of art produced since the mid-20th century in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Latin America, and its diasporas” (MAC Educa n.d.; my translation). In addition to carrying out museological work through a plan of collections, publications and educational programs, the Museum is considered a center for research on contemporary culture, which has resulted in a dynamic relationship with the issues that define the field of contemporary art (MAC Educa n.d.). Since its founding, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico has put importance on regional interconnectedness between Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Latin American art and its diasporas (Reyes Franco 2022, 13). It has presented exhibitions that focus on Caribbean art and the issues artists have identified and addressed concerning the region’s history as the birthplace of colonial empires (13).

One of its main resources to educate on contemporaneity in an accessible manner can be found in its collection of around 1200 works from Puerto Rican, Caribbean and Latin American contemporary artists. In addition, it offers a range of activities that include discussion forums, meetings with artists, workshops and activities for the community (MAC Educa n.d.). Furthermore, MAC Puerto Rico invited professionals from other disciplines to serve as advisors in the conceptualization of projects, which has contributed to creating new audiences and alternative models of exhibition and educational programs through the collaborative design of integration strategies. This is the case of, for example, the relationship with the scientific community, environmentalists and civil rights defenders, and the working alliances maintained with diverse entities that result in transdisciplinary civic education and have the effect of improving the quality of life and the pluralization of the voices that speak from the Museum (MAC Educa n.d.).

“El trópico es político: arte caribeño bajo el régimen de la economía del visitante” is one fairly recent exhibition showcased at MAC Puerto Rico.⁶ This exhibition offers works by artists from various Caribbean islands, interested in investigating critical ideas about paradise and its connection to the region’s tourism economy (Reyes Franco 2022, 9). According to the main curator, Marina Reyes Franco, this exhibition is part of the MAC’s efforts over the last decade that “conceived different artistic projects and formed alliances with community groups, particularly those most vulnerable to displacement and climate change along our coasts. These issues, along with the recognition of ancestral knowledge and historically marginalized identities, play a fundamental role in MAC’s work” (2022, 9). Despite the diversity in languages and cultures among the Caribbean islands, the common thread among them is the colonial heritage of occupation by European empires and transnational capitalism, which seeks cheaper labor abroad. The exhibition raised the link between plantation economy and tourism economies in the Caribbean. The plantation economy model is a way to examine the reasons behind many of the issues faced in the Caribbean region. As developed by Lloyd Best and Kari Polanyi Levitt, the plantation theory draws a relationship between metropolis and hinterland/center and periphery taking into account the historical impacts of slavery, colonialism, and mercantilism on the global economic structure (Samuda 2021, ii). The metropolis is the nucleus of political and economic authority within a given geographic region, characterized as a ‘pinnacle of societal development’ since it has a fruitful labor market, access to education, health and other added values that raise the standard of living (Samuda 2021, 6). In contrast, the hinterland typically sustains industries centered around resource extraction, crude processing and raw material production, it offers comparatively lower living standards and lacks the capacity to resist the political and economic influence exerted by the metropolis (Samuda 2021, 6).

We can see that the plantation economy is a colonial legacy. Yet, it is so rooted in the Caribbean that any modifications to it are just mere adaptations within the already established framework, leading to these countries to continue their dependence on foreign ownership (Reyes Franco 2022, 22). This circles back to the visitor’s economy in Puerto Rico. In the past, Puerto Rico had an agriculture-based economy dependent on plantations, with a focus on crops such as sugar for export. Now, this is being rebranded to the visitor’s economy, where people from more “affluent countries” feel drawn by the allure of these tropical countries and the financial incentives

⁶ For a visual reference, please retrieve the [exhibition’s text](#) and the [Museum’s visuals](#).

they can get (2022, 19-20). According to the curator Reyes Franco, “the selection of works in this exhibition focused on the body, territory and economy-investigates the effects of tourism on Caribbean artists and their cultural production, and how the neocolonial relationship embodied in the tourism industry affects the way Caribbean cultures are represented to visitors” (2022, 19). The works selected for this exhibition touch on topics that are all related to the legacy and still present plantation economy, such as: the resignification of post-military spaces; issues of self-representation and sexuality; national identity, real estate, land rights, and access to beaches and other natural resources; and tax havens (2022, 20). All these works are not only meant to point out the current state but are also a way to reinterpret life in the Caribbean, the opportunities to transform and emancipate from these legacies.

In its 40 years of existence, MAC Puerto Rico has established itself as a center for research into contemporary culture, guided by a plan of collections, publications and comprehensive educational programs to facilitate the appreciation of the collections presented (Cosme 2014, 7). Without losing focus on its essence as a Caribbean Museum, MAC Puerto Rico is in constant relation with the artistic production of the Caribbean and its diasporas, facilitating the space for both artists and audiences to have an approach to the concepts and techniques that are worked in Puerto Rico as well as the neighboring islands (Cosme 2014, 8). MAC Puerto Rico’s goal is to be a register of voices rather than imposing a singular standard: it strives to serve as a platform for the cultivation of knowledge, embracing the inherent diversity of artistic expression (Cosme 2014, 9).

4.2 Cuauhtemallan

“Entiendo que en mi naturaleza esta la búsqueda de la dignidad, y la dignidad no me la da el país ni el estado, no me la da el museo ni la sociedad.”

—Maya Huracan in interview with the author

It is crucial to acknowledge the aftermath of the Spanish colonization, the Guatemalan civil war from 1960 to 1996 and the genocide that occurred during this period of unrest among the historical events that marked and shaped decoloniality in Guatemala. By now we know that the

Spanish colonization brought centuries of violence, ethnic cleansing and repression. In Guatemala, it also came to replace the socio-economic establishment that was set by the indigenous/Mayan civilization, turning the people and their ancient costumes into nothing but the ones who were forced to work on the plantations (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). Guatemala decolonized in 1821 but coloniality was well alive and replicated by a series of powers aligned with the country's oligarchy (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.).

Fast forward to 1954, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed a coup d'état against the democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz, since his reforms were categorized as left-leaning and helping to promote communism, which conflicted with the interests of the powerful multinational corporations. This event led to the following 36 years of violence and repression (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). Throughout the 60s and the 70s, the military rule in Guatemala carried out efforts to erase any sign of communism and remove their political opponents from the picture. This prompted the left to grow increasingly militarized and launched a civil war against the government (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). The leftist guerilla gained support from the indigenous community since they viewed it as the last resort to obtain justice for their historical marginalization and as a way to create a fair economic and political situation for all (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). However, the government used it as an excuse to categorize all Mayans as enemies of the state because they were allied with the insurrection, and thus further repress them (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). By 1978, under the command of Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia, the conflict saw a major escalation in violence and reprisals and by the early 1980s a 'Silent Holocaust' – as the period is considered today – descended over Guatemala, with the number of extrajudicial killings rising from 100 in 1978 to over 10,000 in 1981 according to the figures established by the Historical Clarification Commission (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). By 1982, Efraim Rios Montt had come to power and replaced Lucas Garcia. Efraim Rios launched the operation called 'scorched earth' against the Mayan community. Torture, rape, checkpoints, buildings were demolished; crops and drinking water were fouled these were the 'tactics' used by the military government. This period from 1982 to 1983 is considered the bloodiest, as a large part of the indigenous population was killed or disappeared. The numbers are estimated to be around 70,000. It is important to note that throughout this period, the military government was backed by the U.S. government (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.).

After years of terror in 1986, the peace process began after the civilian government passed a new constitution, and the peace process mediated by the United Nations reached a final agreement in 1996. Despite having reached a peace agreement after these atrocities committed by the government for almost 40 years, the level of impunity remained. Despite the efforts of the truth commissions, prosecutions for these crimes were obstructed by the influence of former officials implicated in human rights abuses and by the intimidation and corruption of the domestic legal system by narco-traffickers (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.). In 2013, Efraín Ríos Montt was sentenced to 80 years in prison after he was found guilty of charges of genocide against Ixil-Mayans and crimes against humanity (Castillo 2013). The conviction was overturned and he died before the retrial concluded. Nevertheless, in 2018, the tribunal ruled that the military committed genocide during his rule (Cuffe 2021). According to the Historical Clarification Commission appointed by the United Nations, it is estimated that “over 200,000 people were killed or forcibly disappeared between 1960 and 1996, where 83% of the people were indigenous Maya and 93% of the human rights violation were carried by government forces” (The Center for Justice and Accountability n.d.).

4.2.1 Decoloniality in the Contemporary Art Spaces and Museums

Guatemala’s contemporary art scene has a handful of artists who, through their art practices, are addressing the current state and violence in Guatemala within a greater system of coloniality. As Anibal Quijano theorized, coloniality “persists as an ideological and epistemic tool of domination embedded in systems of power brought about by the history of colonization” (Cornejo 2013, 26). Coloniality is not the removal of colonial powers but what remains of it nowadays and it has taken different forms to control all levels of our society.

For Guatemala’s contemporary scene, this takes the form of indignity and the body. The artists articulate the colonial wound of state violence through the body (26). This is incredibly important in this context because, as author Kency Cornejo states, it questions and critiques coloniality through indigenous embodiment of knowledge and cosmologies delinking from Eurocentric notions of knowledge (26). This also makes sense in the Guatemalan context because it is a logical response to several historical events. With the emergence of modernism in Latin America in the twentieth century, Indigeneity became a popular theme among artists who returned

from studying the avant-garde movements (Las Vanguardias) in Europe (25). The rising flat space or two-dimensional techniques taken from the avant-garde movements mixed with a romanticized view of indigeneity became a way to strengthen nationalist discourse in Guatemala (25). However, at the same time there were artists highlighting an imagined Indigenous identity, there was repression against Indigenous peoples in Central America taking place under various government-led military campaigns (25). In Guatemala specifically, this was palpable in the genocide led by ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, which resulted in over 1,771 Mayan-Ixil killed and 29,000 displaced over his seventeen-month rule (25). So, even if Indigeneity was being addressed in some way in the arts, the Indigenous body remained a war zone. As Kency Cornejo states in her work “Indigeneity and Decolonial Seeing in Contemporary Art of Guatemala”, “the Indigenous body remains the object of violence, historical discourse and sociopolitical analysis, and is rarely acknowledged as a voice or enunciation of visual epistemologies...the Indigenous body remained a representation from the gaze of another. It appears that unless an artwork figuratively depicts village life, customs or landscapes (subject matter that fits within an already accepted folkloric style), Indigenous artists are disqualified from art narratives as creators of contemporary or experimental art, much less as contributors to an intellectual or philosophical artistic debate” (25). Today, contemporary artists are using Indigeneity and the body to reclaim their own identity and to call out how through these same aspects they have been relegated to a romanticized view when in reality they keep facing racist, colonialist treatment that dehumanizes them and even leads to their death (26). These artists are bringing to the forefront decolonial visual thinking.

During my research, one curator who stood out in this sense was Maya Juracan, whom I had the pleasure of interviewing for this research. To understand Maya’s practice, it is crucial to look at her story and career evolution. Maya identifies as a Mayan, mestizo woman born from a non-Indigenous mother and an Indigenous father (Annex B).⁷ At the time of the internal armed in Guatemala, her family exiled to the city, where she was raised to be “non-Indigenous”. This is a fairly typical racist practice where racialized people for several reasons are forced or feel pressured to hide and erase certain aspects of themselves. This caused her to be out of sync with her roots. Maya shared that the first time she heard her grandmother speak in Kaqchikel, her native language, she thought she was speaking English (Annex B). Maya explains that there was a persistent sense of disconnection within herself that was hard to articulate yet she knew deep down that her reality

⁷ Annex B. Maya Juracan, Interview by author, September 14, 2023.

couldn't be it and that there was more out there. As Maya herself said, "I was always in resistance" (Annex B; my translation). Her first approach to what would later bloom into an understanding of her experience came when she decided to attend university to study languages and literature at age 15.

Studying literature made me understand many things. I was not going to graduate as a writer; I was going to graduate as someone who knows how to teach literature and the history of literature. In that process, I discovered how fascinating history is and began to investigate further. At 18 years old, I started teaching students between the ages of 13 and 15, and I realized that I had no texts to help me teach them about the history of Guatemala and all the stories that shaped it. Those texts did not exist because they have been silenced. The only available texts did not show the whole picture. Inspired by a piece by Diego Rivera where he tells the history of Guatemala, the revolution, and the counterrevolution, I took all the art pieces of post-war artists, works by Diego Rivera, social realism, etc., to begin telling the stories of the country, stories of resistance. This is where I realized the power of history and visual art and how I found in art a way to convey untold stories. (Annex B; my translation)

After this event, Maya decided to direct her career to visual art and she went to study contemporary art and cultural management in Seville with the support of scholarships. It is clear that Maya's personal experience shapes her work. Maya herself said: "I never did art for art's sake; my work was the analysis of what pieces could help the resistance" (Annex B; my translation). In 2011, she created a project called "*Proyecto 44*" that sought to tell the history of the revolution in Guatemala through art. She made a call for artists who wanted to talk about the '44 revolution. She selected the artists, wrote a curatorial text and put together an exhibition with the help of another history professor who specializes in this topic. She recalls that she was "telling stories and that is exactly what a curator does" even though, at this time, she still had no idea what being a curator or curatorship was in itself" (Annex B; my translation). Later in 2015, after a former President was imprisoned in Guatemala, she realized that "*Proyecto 44*" was telling this story to the people who already knew about it, so she decided to take "*Proyecto 44*" to the streets. They placed 3,000 little plastic soldiers outside the national palace on October 20th, which coincided with the revolution's anniversary: "The people that passed by could relate the event and they would voice out 'oh this is because the revolution'" (Annex B; my translation). After this, Maya began to explore everything that is contemporary art since she realized that her practice falls under these parameters, yet it quickly sunk in that there were little to no people in this sphere who looked like

her. Maya recalls that “there was no one of mixed race, that I had not studied art as such, most of them were very white people and I did not feel represented” (Annex B; my translation).

Maya began collaborating with La Casa de la Memoria. This museum has a particular history because it belongs to the Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH). CALDH is a human rights organization that exercises autonomous political action on Mayan peoples and communities, women and youth through several mediums but especially through strategic litigation, which pursues legal cases to achieve social change and promote human rights (CALDH n.d.-b). For example, they were the ones who brought forward and won the genocide trial in Guatemala (CALDH n.d.-b). La Casa de la Memoria is a permanent space that aims to deconstruct the historical memory of Guatemala by studying, analyzing and reflecting on several occurrences throughout Guatemala’s history in order to reconstruct a historical memory that reflects the collective identity of the country (CALDH n.d.-a). When Maya began working here, in collaboration with another curator named Anabela Acevedo, they started working on a photographic archive that told the story of Guatemala in times of war with a series of photographs that were from CALDH and that had been used during the genocide trial (Annex B).

One Biennale I found while researching for this case study was the Biennale Arte Paiz, which I later discovered Maya had also collaborated with. Established in 1978 by the non-profit organization Fundación Paiz para la Educación y la Cultura, the Bienal de Arte Paiz is the largest biennale in Central America and the second-oldest in Latin America after São Paulo (Profile n.d.). Its main focus is the promotion of local artists and the consolidation of the visual arts scene in Guatemala, further decentering from traditional/colonial ways of replicating art and instead turning its focus to the Central American production of art (Pluecker 2018; Profile n.d.). The biennale holds large format art exhibitions within the contemporary production – be it photography, painting, performances, installations, sculptures, videos, interventions on public spaces, etc. – and it takes place biannually and they choose works that represent the theme selected by the Biennale to create a space for analysis and dialogue among the contemporary art realm (Profile n.d.). Arte Paiz brings Central America to the spotlight by recognizing that contemporary art lives in various spaces, not only in the white cubes from the biggest world capitals. Through that recognition, they can connect to historically marginalized communities. In addition to working against hierarchical definitions that place indigenous art on an inferior level, always in the past, never present- or future-oriented (Pluecker 2018). According to John Pleucker, Arte Paiz is “operating from a

different script entirely, looking in other directions, this biennial is pursuing a deeper, longer-term set of inquiries about decolonization, community-based arts, and the meaning of the contemporary in a context of post-civil-war violence, dire inequities, and an international art world that largely ignores Central American artistic production” (2018). I found Maya’s role in Arte Paiz very important because her interest was always to conduct social processes that would lead to social resistance. “I began to depatriarchalize the gaze and decolonize the eye. How am I going to judge the past with this feminist, decolonized, depatriarchalized eyes? one of the tools I used was not to sweep anything under the rug. If we had pieces that were racist, we are going to talk about it and we are not going to hide anything” (Annex B; my translation).

And this didn’t stop at radical honesty but spilled to what type of art the biennale was showcasing. She also invited the collective H.I.J.O.S, whose practice focuses on keeping alive the memory of the people who disappeared or were killed during the civil war in Guatemala (1960-1996), filled the inside and outside of a structure in Guatemala by wheat-pasting images of the people who disappeared and were massacred during this period, along with an explanation of who they were and what they fought for (Pluecker 2018). These decisions came with a backlash. Maya adds that the criticism revolved around the idea that this took the spotlight away from the real Guatemalan artists by presenting these projects that “are not real art” (Annex B). Maya recalls gaining a better understanding of what she was doing from this experience. As she explains: “I was able to frame what I was doing. I understood art, what art it and what is not art for my own contextual needs. To consider art as nothing more than an object, I understood that art is a social event. Everything that happens socially I will call art. If art is not our native peoples, if art is not the tools of pain, then you are not talking about a contextual art, you are talking about an aspirational art” (Annex B; my translation).

At Paiz, Maya did what she could with the tools she had. She still considered that Paiz Foundation had racist and classist biases that they needed to work through (Annex B). However, it was also a moment of reflection to decide in her mind and heart how she didn’t want to be as a curator. It could also be seen as the steppingstone to what her practice looks like today. After Paiz, Maya went on to make a monument to the curator that she didn’t want to be: “Maybe I didn’t know who I wanted to be as a curator but I knew who I didn’t want to be as a curator. I did not want to do it through systemic violence, through racism, through the uses of power, through machismo” (Annex B; my translation).

During my research, I got familiarized with La Revuelta. A woman collective seeking to use art and community curatorship as a tool to retell the history of women who were silenced throughout Guatemalan history and to create decentralized spaces where women's work can be recognized (Manifiesto Revoltoso n.d.). This project, co-founded by Maya, was born in part due to the way she has been treated in the arts. She recalls that during the pandemic she gave a Zoom class titled "*Women in Guatemalan Art*" that was based on her curatorial thesis about depatriarchalizing looks. Around 160 women connected and engaged in a discussion that would lead to questions such as "What can one do to tell these stories that do not come from the male vision?" to which Maya responds "nothing about us [women] without us [women]. If someone was about to tell the story of women in art it was going to be ourselves (Annex B; my translation)". Maya then involved all the women who participated and were interested in a curatorial project she was starting at the time: La Revuelta. La Revuelta, which translates into revolt or uprising, is meant to create space for all women. Maya notes that the art world can be violent because it is like a big cake and everyone wants a piece. However, the goal is to teach all women to be bakers so they can make their own cakes and never again fight for a job. This way, we can start to learn together and exchange knowledge (Annex B).

La Revuelta is a revolt against the system. The idea is to show consciousness and raised ideals when systems of violence are not reproduced. It is meant to be a space of constant questioning. As Maya shared in her reflections on La Revuelta, "we will question again and again if we are ever violent, we will adjust and change what needs to be changed". La Revuelta raises questions about women employment: it prioritizes hiring women, especially in a field dominated by men; it tackles self-care as a woman in the art field; it questions how many days a week we are going to work, how much budget we are going to spend on something, how many exhibitions will be done per year; it addresses hierarchy structures, namely if everyone earns the same salary and performs the same functions. Intergenerationally, understanding that La Revuelta has a beginning and an end for its members, leaving space for other women to come and continue the work. La Revuelta is a practice of systematized feminist curatorial productions, not only with the feminist's name but to use the tools to change the structures. It deconstructs how a feminist curator and a feminist space look like.

Contemporary museums in Guatemala still replicate the same patterns that have been exposed throughout chapter one of this research. As Maya expands on her experience in museums

as a curator, the museums do not cease their power and their model and form can be extremely violent, unacceptable and exploitative, yet many artists still put up with this for their love of art.

The spaces invite you to participate but they don't widen their doors, they don't open the way. You as a racialized person, you as a woman, you as a diverse body have to enter the little space that they make but they are not opening it further, and they force you to enter it but they do not change anything, the structure remains the same, the processes remain the same. They know you but the door is still the same size and if it was hard for me to get in through the door then it would be hard for more people like me to get in. They want us to pass but they don't give us the tools to walk or they want us to pass on this bridge where only cars pass and you can't walk but I come walking. (Annex B; my translation)

Taking this into account, it was important for me as a researcher to turn my eye to spaces that could be practicing decoloniality on a non-performative way and I found some non-institutionalized ones with a decolonial proposal.

La Biental en Resistencia is one biennale that entered into the art space in Guatemala. Co-founded by Maya Juracan, this biennial is set to recontextualize how we understand museums in Latin America and create a process of what a biennial would be without a white cube. As Maya adds in the interview I held with her, they created this to “contextualize the needs of the territory of Guatemala. It was the first time that we were considering the idea of building art theory from this territory, from our responsibility as political subjects” (Annex B; my translation). Taking these as a starting point, La Biental en Resistencia seeks to use the platform of art to generate community dialogues that highlight problems, uncomfortable issues and social exercises that affect the Latin American region (Annex B).

In order to create a process that honors its decolonial essence, there are some aspects of this biennale worth exploring. Breaking with the white cube is one of them. In La Biental en Resistencia, there is no centralized, contained physical space, no one building that you can go into to see the works exhibited. La Biental en Resistencia is outside, in the streets. This was decided after Maya came across the text of Maria Lugones ‘Callejeras’. This idea is aligned with the spatial decentralization of new or critical museology, where activities are no longer confined to the four walls of an institution’s building and the institution can no longer delimit the boundaries of what is being exhibited. Only the interactions of individuals in the community with the exhibition can do that (Hauenschild 2022, 27). Going beyond the four walls allows the museum to become a space without defined limits in constant creation and evolution, where the museum now belongs

to the community. Another aspect is assessing the role of the curator. The role of curator as the main or sole overseer of the exhibition is not present here. Instead, La Bienal en Resistencia focuses on community curatorship, recognizing all people as political subjects and agents. Instead of asking for extensive CV and portfolios, La Bienal en Resistencia acknowledges the difficulties of academia in Guatemala to become a “trained curator”. La Bienal is opening the museums to other voices, not just guest curators or any other kinds of authorities whose collaboration with museum professionals has always been taken for granted (Lorente 2017, 127). Instead, they are opening the door to people who have experience in a particular area in which they can develop their project and invite the viewer to their context and make them feel their essence and struggles (Annex B).

The Nuevo Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (NuMu) is the first and only museum in Guatemala solely dedicated to supporting, exhibiting, and documenting contemporary art (NuMu n.d.). It is an artist-run museum that, in their own words, is dedicated to “re-evaluate what it means to be a contemporary art museum in the 21st century, in both the local context of Guatemala City and the international art scene” (NuMu n.d.). It was founded in 2012 by artists Jessica Kairé and Stefan Benchoam when they were having conversations about local Guatemalan art scene. This was a turning point and the beginning of a search for a way to establish a museum in Guatemala that would support contemporary artists and cultural producers and would welcome all but with the goal of benefiting the exchange, growth and accessibility of contemporary art for the local community (NuMu n.d.). Like most project that start small, they started as a digital platform until they stumbled into the iconic space that would turn into the physical home of NuMu. It consists of a 2 x 2.5 meters egg-shaped building in the center of the city of Guatemala. According to the directors, “NuMu’s minuscule size has led artists to think creatively about space, and develop site-specific projects that would not otherwise have come to life” (NuMu n.d.). NuMu’s central mission is to offer the necessary support to realize artistic projects of great value, despite the shortage of local institutions and both private and governmental funding (NuMu n.d.). It is clear that with the combination of local and international projects, NuMu is striving to create bridges for collaboration and spaces where critical thinking is developed.

4.3 Commentary

I see the decolonial efforts that Puerto Rico and Guatemala are undertaking as a response to the systematic oppression faced under colonialism and coloniality. These efforts have been carried out and propelled by their own people. If I take a closer look at some of the examples I have brought up, Puerto Ricans and Guatemalans are not looking to construct novel concepts to fight colonialism and coloniality, but they are going back to their own roots of ancestral knowledge and genealogies. They are bringing back the knowledge that has been silenced and buried by Western colonization. This reminds me of what Vazquez mentioned in an interview, where he explained how the artists are not individualized creators who have had a brilliant idea that no one else has come up with, but that they are people who have put their strength to enter into relation with what coloniality has denied or silenced (Vazquez and Contreras 2016).

I found quite interesting and in line with decolonial theory that each region has its own concerns or focus, and that establishing a universal approach to decoloniality is not possible. To develop more on this idea, I had previously discussed in chapter 3 some topics that are recurring in the discussion on decoloniality, like the restitution of looted art, changes in narratives and practicing vulnerability as a tool towards decoloniality in museums. Yet, some of these points did not come through in the discussion of my case studies and my research findings. Initially, I thought some points would have a bigger role, like the topic of restitution of looted art, especially considering the historical background of both countries and the importance of restitution of looted art in the decolonial space. However, this aspect did not stand out in my research. I do have to note that I understand that restitution of looted art in contemporary art museums leans towards the discussion and dissection of the topic, rather than the presence of such objects in their collections. From my case studies, I saw a bigger focus on the changes in narratives and other aspects that we can take into consideration when practicing decoloniality, like the role of community and the reclaiming of silenced narratives.

In the case of Puerto Rico, there has been a predominant highlight in resilience. The island has been under colonial subjugation for years, which has resulted in social, political and economic challenges, in addition to the increased propensity to natural disasters due to climate change, which in itself is a result of centuries of capitalist exploitation (colonial legacy). Despite all of these, we still get to see how Puerto Ricans reconstruct their lives in response to the challenges posed by coloniality. Puerto Rico has used art, art spaces and museums to not only create visibility around these issues but as a way to preserve its own ways of life. No matter how deep coloniality is

engrained in the country, they are using these mediums to show that lives can and will shine regardless and will not be dimmed by coloniality. I think this is beautifully summarized by artist Ivelisse Jiménez in the introduction to the catalog for the exhibition “*IntervalOS (operating systems): Intervalos, confines y territorios*”. She writes:

In this time of confusion, uncertainty and exhaustion, in which each day we question the very nature of our country and our own space in its transformation process, I reaffirm myself in the urgency of being, and by continuing to build from uncertainty. (Jiménez 2019, 08)

Decoloniality is a proponent of other ways of living and this seems like it has deeply resonated in Puerto Rico. According to research, decolonial thought has been well received in the Caribbean, especially among the younger generations and especially among the younger generations involved in activism, in all kinds of mobilization, and also in the academy (Mortari et al. 2023, 146). It becomes clear that Puerto Rico’s art scene and museums are actively trying to decenter European canons that are upheld through coloniality. Puerto Rico has seen the interlocking forces of colonialism and capitalism, “the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power” through the effects of colonialism and globalization/coloniality (Quijano 2000, 533). Puerto Rico is not trying to change a system that does not want to change but rather to create a space that caters to its needs and promotes a local focus on serving the community. For example, I already touched upon the example of #RickyRenuncia. When Puerto Ricans took the streets to demand the then governor Ricardo Rosello to resign in an unprecedented historical move, the whole situation was influenced by decoloniality and the arts. Around that time, anthropologist Ryan Cecil Jobson held an interview with anthropology scholar and climate change voice, Yarimar Bonilla, who explained that people were reinventing democratic procedures (Jobson 2020). A lot of it stems from experiencing colonialism firsthand and still being a colony until the present day, which helped them to understand the power of community to push change and care for each other with the bigger goal of the well-being of all. Years of colonial violence can make one ponder about a life outside of these chains, a life where things are done differently. Decoloniality is a tool that offers exactly that: an option to live differently.

For Guatemala, we see this in the discourse on body, language and identity. Through their decolonial practices, the colonial legacy is challenged, narratives are reframed, and the voices and

experiences of marginalized communities are promoted. By addressing historical injustices and inequalities, they aim to bring forward the invisible and forgotten aspects overlooked in modernity/coloniality aesthetics. As Rolando Vazquez explains in an interview with Barrera Contreras, “the most profound task of decolonial aesthetics: to bring to our experience not only processes but forms of relating to the world that have been suppressed, denigrated, disdained” (Vazquez and Barrera Contreras 2016). Guatemala’s contemporary art scene is freeing itself from the emptiness of modernity/coloniality and, through alternative aesthetic practices, it is rescuing other ways of inhabiting the world that do not fit in modern/colonial time. It is reclaiming these memories that have been silenced or that are being made invisible under coloniality. We see artists that, instead of seeking innovation and following what modernity/coloniality has established for contemporary art, are seeking to redeem the plurality of experiences and histories (Vazquez and Barrera Contreras 2016).

Another significant aspect of decolonial efforts in Guatemalan art and museums is the reclamation and celebration of Indigeneity. As I explained earlier in this chapter, Indigenous perspectives and artistic expressions have been ignored or marginalized by dominant narratives. Through exhibitions, educational programs, and collaborative projects, we see how artists, cultural producers and museums are actively working to incorporate and amplify Indigenous voices and art forms. The creation of spaces for dialogue and reflection, the emphasis on community in the museum and beyond have served as a tool to incorporate pluriversality and challenge traditional historical accounts that would often prioritize the perspectives and interpretations of the colonial powers. In both case studies, they go against the individualistic propositions of modernity/coloniality. Instead, they undergo the task of remembering and reconstructing the relationship with what has been lost. Through their art pieces, they are calling out the current state of things; they are looking into their own roots to try and find other ways. This creates a space for community, to learn, to dialogue, to experience what has been denied in the past or what could not have been accessed as a result of colonization and coloniality. Decoloniality again presents an option to wind together their present and those multiple experiences in the past that have been ignored, silenced and oppressed. To expand on the point of community that I just mentioned, the collaborative practices and community engagement seen throughout this chapter have been an integral part to the decolonial efforts. For example, in Guatemalan art and museums, the concept of community draws from ancestral knowledge, in the sense that they do not see themselves as

separate individuals, but as interconnected beings. This idea of connectedness brings me back to what Rolando Vazquez explains in the already mentioned interview with Barrera Contreras in regard to connectedness being their source of hope and resistance against a system that seeks to divide and dominate; and to the fact that, instead of prioritizing the individual, they emphasize relationships and shared experiences (Vazquez and Barrera Contreras 2016). Since the struggle to dismantle coloniality is not only individual but collective, efforts and social movements should be aligned with collective well-being and justice. All of these efforts by the Guatemalan art scene and museums strive to create a cultural landscape that acknowledges a previously experienced silencing phenomenon, providing spaces for healing, dialogue, and understanding, while highlighting the resilience and contributions of historically marginalized communities. However, as Maya herself explains in the interview I held with her, these participatory efforts are not meant to stay on a superficial or performative level where the foundations of the system remain untouched. This is not only about inclusion but about insurrection, where museums and art spaces recognize and move away from the systemic violence, they have historically subjected the communities to. I believe that adding a focus not only in the museums but also the contemporary art spaces as well helps to understand the approaches that museums can be taking in both case studies, since a big part of decoloniality, in both Guatemala and Puerto Rico, is the role of community. The decolonial practice in both countries does not occur in isolation. The community effort has been crucial to push decoloniality in the contemporary art scene and in the museum, as what is occurring in the country influences the art scene, which, consequently, influences the museum.

Conclusion

This research investigated decoloniality in contemporary art museums in Central America and the Caribbean, with the objective of finding out to what extent coloniality is still present in Central America and the Caribbean and how decolonial efforts are perceived in the contemporary art scene and contemporary art museums through the case studies of Guatemala and Puerto Rico. In order to get there, in the first chapter, I dedicated part of the research to exploring the museum and how it came to be. In the second chapter, I discussed the role coloniality plays, how it is tied to museums and how decoloniality is an option for museums. In the third chapter, I explored common threads in the discussion around decoloniality in museums.

As Benjamin Davis explains in his research “Globalization/Coloniality: A Decolonial Definition and Diagnosis” (2018), decolonial scholars are attempting to open a space for alternatives in ways of life. It is not a reform of the current institutions but a liberation from them (Davis 2018, 8). It is to free ourselves from ways of living that have been imposed on us but do not necessarily belong to us. Decoloniality is a tool we have to delink from the colonial matrix of power. From delinking from the enunciation/enunciator that controls knowledge and the messages that should be considered as truth to epistemic reconstruction. Achieving this requires openness to understand how the rhetoric of modernity affects us and how we must go through a constant unlearning to reduce ways of thinking that uphold Western disciplinary as the pinnacle of knowledge through its institutions (university, museums, theological institutions) (Mignolo 2018, 228). Decoloniality aims at reimagining how we live because “multiple ontologies are only possible if multiple epistemologies are possible. There cannot be multiple ontologies ‘recognized’ by the benevolence of one universal” (227).

However, exposing the coloniality of power is not to dismantle it. When I began my research, one of the critiques that resurged from time to time with decoloniality was how, although it was possible to identify the problem, it did not necessarily offer a solution for the issues it was exposing. Nevertheless, after this extensive research, I have seen how decoloniality is expansive enough to acknowledge its strengths as well as recognize its shortcomings. Decoloniality still recognizes that one of the principal issues with it is actively fighting against the urge to fall into the same trap that coloniality/modernity did with the CMP (Mignolo 2018, 224). That is the reason we are not going to find “guidelines” on how to practice decoloniality. As Mignolo states, “there is no decolonial master plan for that. Each trajectory will be molded and modeled in the praxis of

living of those who engage in doing it” (228). Decoloniality leaves the door open for various approaches to come through and either feed the decolonial approach or present a completely different perspective and narrative. Decoloniality’s goal is not to convert existing institutions or expect them to run decolonially; instead, the goal is to create new forms of living that are not dependent on the actors and institutions that produce and maintain the narratives of modernity/coloniality (146). If the expectation is not to reform but to liberate, then the only logical conclusion for museums, as we know them today, would be for them to be abolished. Decoloniality presents a complete systematic change and it cannot sustain itself on the foundations left by modernity/coloniality.

I have explored some of the “reforms to the museum”, which are the efforts made for the so-called betterment of the existing institutions. Reforms hint that museums can take steps towards decoloniality. In chapter 3 of this research, I was left with a sense that museums can be self-reflecting on their origins and history, and may re-evaluate their decisions regarding the direction of the museum, the narratives they are pushing forward, and the artists they are giving a platform to. These are all steps into the right direction. However, the reforms are only effective if they are working towards the abolition of the current system. I know the word abolition might seem harsh. This reminds me of a debate I attended on [prison] abolitionism with Angela Davis and Gina Dent organized by LEFFEST Lisboa Film Festival in 2022. Dent explained how abolitionism was seen as a destructive project and people get confused or do not see it as a possibility to live in a world where prisons might not exist; yet, abolitionism is about the reimagination of the system. Abolition is not about replacing one institution with another institution or having reforms on reforms, especially if it is not accompanied with structural changes. This stuck with me all of this time because the same logic can be applied to museums. Museums have also operated according to prevailing norms: for instance, from the cabinet of curiosities, which was the blueprint of Western museums, showcasing the looted art and artifacts from colonization, to the exhibition arrangements and architecture during the Enlightenment period and the current ordering of exhibition in contemporary art museums. When such norms are so ingrained through a system like coloniality, it makes the possibility of the emergence of an alternative viewpoint harder (Ariese and Wróblewska 2022, 52).

This first approach was a way to understand the foundation in which countries like Puerto Rico and Guatemala, who have had a long story of being affected by colonization and coloniality,

have shaped their own understanding and relation to decoloniality. The attempt to eliminate and silence a population's way of being has fostered the rescuing of those repressed bodies and cosmologies. Throughout the case studies' section, I explored some of the efforts carried out by countries to decenter from European and Western ways in museums, art and aesthetics. Conversely, they are centering on local production, aesthesis and reshaping museums. Not trying to change a system that was never there for them but rather rescuing their own roots. In addition, in this reclaiming of silenced narratives, we also see that Puerto Rico and Guatemala are not focused on erasing the past. Instead, they acknowledge that an important step in the decoloniality process is 'calling things by its name'. It is necessary to make everything visible and talk about it, otherwise we indirectly end up participating in the cover-up that has taken place under coloniality and colonization. Again, it is not about trying to erase narratives or replacing one narrative with another, but rather to bring forward everything that has happened with full transparency.

Furthermore, with this case studies, I get to see how these actors do not treat decoloniality in isolation but as a whole. Decoloniality of museums cannot happen in a vacuum; it is in interaction with the rest of the existing systems. For contemporary art museums to practice decoloniality they of course need to take into account of the contradiction where they live in (of having colonial origins and on the other end trying to be a space that brings forward different realities in an attempt of pluriversality), confronting these contradictions and acknowledging the limitations they might find on their way. However, it is also crucial to take a look at the socio-political role of the country, what is happening in the contemporary art world and the contemporary museums. All these areas feed each other. This feedback and interaction might aid in the way of contemporary museums to decenter from this established norm and give space for artists and curators to retell, reframe and reclaim their stories without being considered performative. In other words, to practice decoloniality because at the heart of this process is dismantling colonial legacies and creating genuine spaces for new realities to thrive.

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Annexes

A.

Carlos Rivera, semi-structured online interview by author,

September 14, 2023

Lisbon, Portugal.

María Gabriela Sinclair: Primero que nada, quería darle las gracias profesor por estar aquí. Tengo un par de preguntas, pero quería que fuese más una conversación...un dialogo. Voy a empezar por darle un poco de contexto sobre mi investigación y luego adentramos en las preguntas como tal.

Carlos Rivera: ¡Excelente!

MGS: Decidí investigar sobre la decolonialidad en los museos en Centroamérica y el Caribe específicamente los países de habla hispana dentro de esta región. Como soy de Panamá, no quería enfocarme en Panamá en este momento de mi carrera ya que lo sentía muy personal, pero si quería sentir cierta cercanía con el tema y así fue como escogí enfocarme en Puerto Rico y Guatemala. Además, que me parece muy interesante la propuesta decolonial que tienen en estos países.

Mi tesis la dividí en dos partes, la primera mitad enfocada en la teoría y la segunda mitad ya enfocada a los casos de estudio que estoy haciendo. El primer capítulo de mi tesis está dedicada a los museos. Comienzo dando un poco de historia sobre los museos y como llegaron a ser. Empezando que son un producto de la colonización y como ahora son un recordatorio que la colonialidad existe y que está viva. Originalmente siendo un espacio para que los colonizadores exhibieran sus 'premios' y 'conquistas' que en realidad era lo que habían robado, pasando a ser espacios donde se les añade ese matiz de 'espacios de conocimiento' durante el periodo de la ilustración donde ya no era solo exhibir las conquistas, pero educar a la población. A ser lo que vemos hoy, espacios donde nada de eso se percibe a primera vista. Hoy vemos los llamados White Cubes como se les denomina en inglés, donde se le quita cualquier señal sobre el tiempo y el espacio, donde tenemos espacios en blanco que pueden ser llenados con cualquier narrativa que uno quiera. Pero esto no significa que estos espacios no tengan sus ligaciones a esa semilla colonial. Que no sea obvio o que no lo podamos ver a primera vez no significa que no estén ahí. En el segundo capítulo me adentro en la teoría decolonial. Tomando de autores como Aníbal Quijano y Walter D. Mignolo, explico las diferencias entre colonización, descolonización, colonialidad, decolonialidad, aisthesis decolonial. Aparte de las definiciones también es una

buena oportunidad para tratar de sentar las bases sobre los diferentes enfoques que existen dentro de esta teoría. Y al final del capítulo explico que tiene que ver esto con los museos. En el tercer capítulo, es una mezcla de las ideas desarrolladas en los primeros dos capítulos. Donde investigo como se han aplicado o como se ve la decolonialidad en los museos al día de hoy. Luego, salto a la segunda parte de mi investigación, donde desarrollo mis casos de estudio y le dedico un espacio a Puerto Rico y otro a Guatemala. Me parecía importante quitar a Europa del centro de mi investigación. Existe tanta teoría aplicada y desarrollada bajo el paraguas europeo. Yo quería darle un espacio a ver como esta teoría se ve en otras partes del mundo que al final del día lo están haciendo diferente. Aquí entra Puerto Rico y fue donde encontré el trabajo que has desarrollado tan extensamente sobre este tema y la razón por la cual quería tener una conversación contigo

CR: Claro, parece que con tu trabajo estar yendo de lo general a lo particular. Y muy interesante que hayas escogido estos dos estudios de caso ya que usualmente no se comparan así y me gusta que es el enfoque contemporáneo por supuesto y obviamente el contexto de la colonización y de la colonialidad. Los autores que estas utilizando son muy relevantes para pensar el tema e incluso los estudios de caso en sí ya que muchos de los teóricos vienen de Puerto Rico. Tienes a Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfoguel, más recientemente tienes a Rocío Zambrana, que son personas que llevan pensando la colonización porque en Puerto Rico no había otra opción. Me imagino que en Guatemala también tendrás el pensamiento particularmente con esa presencia de ese pensamiento ancestral tan milenario y tan evidente. Y quizá es importante pensar que por un lado la colonialidad trata de hacer esta idea o marcar el contexto de la colonización en esta narrativa o estructura del sistema mundo. Hay un argumento de que la colonialidad es un sistema que aplica a todo el mundo, pero también por otro lado los países y las comunidades y naciones han tenido su propia experiencia con el colonialismo. Lo digo porque en el caso de Puerto Rico es muy particular. Compartimos las historias similares con naciones como Guam y otros países que no se han independizado o se les ha negado de algún modo el derecho humano a la libre determinación. Se coloniza a Puerto Rico en 1493 por España y luego se coloniza de nuevo en 1898 con Estados Unidos en el tratado de París y básicamente esa experiencia tan fuerte que hasta el día de hoy nos afecta. El dominio estadounidense es omnisciente. El presidente y el congreso tienen potestad completa sobre el país y tiene la facilidad de veto cualquier ley que se produzca en el país. Puerto Rico es un territorio no incorporado y que Puerto Rico pudiese ser vendido o cedido por Estados Unidos si quisieran porque tienen esa potestad. Es una particularidad que tiene PR y que se manifiesta en el arte por cientos de años el tema de colonización es imposible de no pensarlo.

MGS: ¡Total! De hecho, en mi investigación empiezo el capítulo de PR diciendo que no podemos hablar de PR y la decolonialidad sin hablar sobre los efectos que el colonialismo y la colonialidad han tenido en PR. Y hablo un poco sobre la colonización española, las secuelas de la guerra entre España y Estados Unidos y del huracán María. Obviamente tú me puedes brindar más contexto sobre este último punto o tu perspectiva viendo como el huracán María sirvió como la última gota que derramó el vaso de agua y que a partir de este incidente se ve mucho más reflejado la

importancia de la decolonialidad especialmente en el tema de las artes que él es que estamos enfocando aquí.

CR: Tengo que empezar diciendo que yo no pasé huracán María en PR. Por ejemplo, mis padres si lo pasaron y la casa donde yo me crié se fue con María, se destruyó completamente, pero es muy importante establecer ese punto que no estuve ahí ya que existe un elemento de la experiencia vivida que uno debe pensar. Por no pasar el trauma del huracán me ponga en una posición de mirarlo no tan distante pero no paso por la experiencia vivida. La segundo es que si eres puertorriqueño o caribeño siempre has pasado por una experiencia de huracán. En mi vida he pasado 3 o 4 huracanes porque nací y crecí ahí y no he pasado por María, pero sí por otros huracanes. Lo tercero es que el desastre del huracán maría no fue tan natural. El huracán aceleró el desastre que eventualmente se volvió una crisis humanitaria en PR por varios factores. Uno, por años de abandono de parte del gobierno de estados unidos y de puerto rico de mucha de la infraestructura que PR tiene particularmente la estructura que tiene la energía eléctrica. Hundo dejadez. Segundo, Estado unidos desde la salida de la Marina de Vieques, pero básicamente desde que US perdió el interés de PR como punto militar. PR tienen una historia de ser ‘la llave las Américas’ hasta el 2004 había muchísimas bases militares en PR y poco a poco la estrategia fue cambiando el foco de US mirando hacia Europa y ahora mirando hacia el pacífico y eso se traduce en disinvestment. No invertir y no hacer nada en PR. Encima de eso tenemos tercero, en el 2016 se declara en quiebra y que pasa ahí, como PR no es un país en el sentido de ser internacionalmente conocido como país como nación pues no puede pedir préstamos al fondo monetario internacional y como no es un estado tampoco podía técnicamente declararse en quiebra, así que había un limbo terrible, donde el gobierno de PR básicamente dijo no puedo pagar la deuda y por otro lado la mayoría de la entidades que PR adeudaba eran de US. PR tuvo que crear una ley para manejar la deuda y es como nace la ley PROMESA. Promesa es la junta de supervisión fiscal que es una junta nombrada por el gobierno de US y es una junta que no es votada (los puertorriqueños no votaron por esa junta) pero tienen la última palabra sobre cualquier ley que se produzca en PR que tenga que ver o tenga implicación de presupuesto. Desde el 2016 y 2017, ha habido una serie de recortes y austeridad. Entonces en un momento precario por neocolonialismo (colonización por medio de la economía). un momento de desinterés por parte de US y nuestra incapacidad de poder ir a nivel internacional a pedir ayuda porque ‘no somos un país’ ‘no somos una nación reconocida’ entonces viene huracán maría. Huracán categoría 4 casi 5 y realmente nos tomó desprevenidos. Pasa el huracán y causa una crisis humanitaria. No había señal de celular por dos semanas. Estábamos totalmente incomunicados. No había agua potable. MESES sin electricidad. Mis padres no tuvieron electricidad por casi 7 meses. Nada funcionaba y la respuesta de estados Unidos no llega hasta una casi dos semanas después del desastre. Fue una experiencia traumática y por eso todo el mundo de algún modo había algo que había que expresar. Por un lado, los ciudadanos puertorriqueños valoran su ciudadanía americana, pero por otro lado esa ciudadanía americana que se suponía que debía traducirse a un trato preferencial (de ciudadano) no pasó. Si fuésemos un país, podría haber llegado ayuda internacional de otros países, pero como estamos limitados a la ayuda de un solo país, nuestro colonizador, no llegó a tiempo. Esa contradicción tenía que salir de

algún modo. El arte contemporáneo solo como catarsis, pero también como manera de tratar de manejar esas contradicciones. Por eso la pieza del poste de Gabriela Torres...

MGS: ¿una pregunta, Gabriela Torres fue una de las artistas invitada a la exposición no existe un mundo pos huracán en el Whitney?

CR: Sí, exacto. Yo veo la pieza expuesta en Embajada por primera vez. La pieza es extraordinaria. Un poste quebrado por los vientos de huracán y tiene un cartel que dice “valora tu ciudadanía americana, valora tu mentira americana”. Es esta contradicción que se ve materializada. Uno de los efectos más poderosos del huracán María fue que dañó por completo el sistema de energía que hasta el día de hoy está frágil. Otro artista que sale en esta exposición de Embajada es Daniel Lind Ramos. La exposición en Embajada es primera exposición que sale como respuesta a lo acontecido. Daniel Lind-Ramos lleva 40 años trabajando trabaja temas de afropuertorriqueñidad/afro-puertorriqueño y toma este tema del huracán y lo trabaja desde la perspectiva única. Su pieza Maria-Maria sale en Embajada y luego sale en Whitney. Primero desde los conocimientos ancestrales del huracán. Huracán siendo una palabra Taína que significa fenómenos atmosféricos. Segundo la representación de la diosa Guavansé, la diosa taína de las tormentas, que domina estos fenómenos atmosféricos. y el conocimiento afro-puertorriqueño e indígena tiene esta complejidad de manejar esta contradicción de por un lado María divinidad femenina, María como la destructora, como la que renueva. Esa complejidad la está sacando como para pensar los huracanes desde esos conocimientos ancestrales que tenemos.

En términos estructurales tienes a Embajada en San Juan que la categorizaría como una galería radical, después el museo de las Américas que sacó una exhibición llamada catarsis. Estas dos exhibiciones que pasaron en Puerto Rico meses después del huracán se dieron sin energía eléctrica o usando plantas/generadores eléctricos y era como saliendo de esta urgencia que tenía la gente de expresarse de manejar esa contradicción, de trabajar el trauma, pero no es un trauma individual, es un trauma colectivo/social. Eventualmente tienes al MAC y después está la diáspora hay más puertorriqueños fuera de Puerto Rico que en Puerto Rico. En US, por ejemplo, hay alrededor de 5.8 millones y PR hay 3.2 millones. Primeras exposiciones en Nuevo México, la mejor para mí, the fine artist, donde sale Muñiz, Francis Gallardo. Esas primeras exposiciones fueron a pulmón, no eran en espacios de museos grandes, eran espacios pequeños o museos lejanos donde la población y los asuntos de PR eran minoría, ejemplo la de fine artist fue en Nuevo México donde la población PR era mínima y a primera vista no hace sentido. Tienes estas primeras expos que están tratando a pulmón de visibilizar la situación puertorriqueña que está comentando el colonialismo del desastre, el cambio climático como resultado directo de la historia colonial. Como dice Mignolo, Quijano y otros teóricos, la colonización crea sistemas como el capitalismo. Tienes otros comentando sobre la ciudadanía americana. Cuando se supone que era lo importante y necesario no nos benefició para nada. Y tienes otros repasando la situación del desastre desde una perspectiva ancestral, indígena, afro-puertorriqueña y hace este retorno a las raíces que no es que no existe, pero había vivido en las periferias. Ejemplo, tenemos a Daniel Lind Ramos, que siempre estuvo en las periferias como artista y no fue hasta sus 63 años que fue reconocido en la expo de

Whitney en el 2019, que empieza a sonar, lo llevan a otras exposiciones y en el 2021 le dan el Genius Grant como fellow y tuvo su expo El Viejo Griot en el MoMA. Tienes a todos estos artistas haciendo comentarios decoloniales, se vio adelantando a causa del desastre, ya que si fue la gota que derramó el vaso y desparramó estas posiciones decoloniales, que a veces uno podía pensar que fue la mecha que sirvió para prender la explosión del verano del 2019 que fue donde los PR se fueron a la calle e hicieron que el gobernador de PR renunciara por primera vez en la historia y este fue el gobernador que estuvo cuando pasó María, Ricardo Rosello #RickyRenuncia. Tienes varias vertientes, pero en su comienzo no fueron iniciativas institucionalizadas. Hubo ciertos atentados como el MAC y el Museo de las Américas en PR y ciertas pequeñas llamas pero el verdadero foco institucional vino con la expo del Whitney “no existe un mundo Pos-huracán” que ha sido 5 años después y en ese punto ya habían pasado muchas cosas. La expo estuvo genial con artistas como Daniel Fong, emergente tocando temas queer, Sofía Gallisá que trabaja la economía del visitante y como después del Huracán se ha exacerbado esa idea que PR es como un paraíso para los visitantes tanto fiscal como espacio paradisiaco. de experimentación para crear otro tipo de economía y h.

MGS: Gracias por toda esta información siento que ha sido perfecto porque he podido hilar cosas que ya sabía, pero obviamente como no soy de PR todas estas cosas que se son un mix de noticias por la cercanía de vivir en Panamá y ahora que estoy investigando sobre el tema. Muchas gracias por eso. Yo sé que desde el primer momento que hablamos me dijiste que te enfocabas más en los artistas y en el arte decolonial que los museos y el nivel institucional, pero la razón por la cual decidí seguir con esta entrevista es porque en mi investigación llevo notando un patrón que al final del día el bastión de la decolonialidad en las artes lo lleva la comunidad, las personas/artistas/productores a nivel individual. Al final del día los museos por más que traten de tener un enfoque decolonial siguen siendo y sintiendo como un tokenism. Bueno tenemos una expo y traemos a todas las artistas mujeres o de un grupo racializado, pero realmente no se siento como un esfuerzo genuino donde se sacuden las bases y las exposiciones que si hay vienen la gran mayoría de las veces de las personas como ya había mencionado. Y siento que no puedo hablar de este tema sin mencionar este aspecto, sería una investigación vacía si no menciono esta parte. La verdad es que al final del día esto va de la mano de los que hablan los scholars sobre cómo no podemos esperar que las instituciones que son el status quo decidan que es hora de “ser decoloniales”.

CR: Debo decir que los curadores en los museos, que son todas mujeres, han tenido su voz y han estado haciendo un trabajo importante. La misma Marcela Guerrero ha sido extraordinaria y para ser justo esta exposición del Whitney lleva planificándose muchos años. Una institución tan colonial como el Whitney trabajar desde ahí dentro lo digo ni me lo imagino. Yo ni quisiera ese trabajo ni un día. Pero tienes personas como Taína Caragol, Josefina Rivera, Yasmin Ramírez, puertorriqueñas extraordinarias que también ha llevado y han gesticulado con mucha candidez, rigor, el trabajo de los artistas puertorriqueños. Lo que pasa cuando pasa el cesado de la institucionalidad entonces se vuelve un poco más difícil y si los artistas son el núcleo generatriz de estos temas. Recientemente tuve una charla aquí en Sídney donde examiné 3 tipos de maneras

de aproximaciones decoloniales en relación al arte. Una es la descolonización de la historia del arte. Un trabajo importante particularmente del historiador del arte, pero también de lo que se entiende como el canon y ya existe literatura sobre la historia del arte. Segundo un trabajo de descolonizar las instituciones como el Whitney, MET, Prado. Son solamente colectivos, artistas, 88 artistas y activistas. El movimiento en NY Decolonize this place que durante el Whitney 2019 hicieron una protesta toda la semana para que sacaran del board del Whitney a Warren Canders que era una persona cuya compañía que tenía era una empresa que fabricaba 'armas' y lo lograron. Este activismo de tratar de descolonizar las instituciones. Tercero esta las personas trabajando desde la perspectiva más teórica que están tratando de crear esas conexiones entre el arte y la colonización, colonialidad, decolonialidad, aesthesis. Una de las cosas que trato de no hacer es no romantizar el arte. Hay arte que es muy problemático y en este mundo que tiende a ser clasista, racista y sexista, etc. entonces uno lo ve a simple viste cuantas personas negras son artistas o son curadores. Cuál es la representación de las mujeres artistas en museos como el MET, cuantas personas son de clase baja, clase trabajadora. El mundo del arte, las instituciones y el mercado tienden a ser espacios que reproducen dinámicas coloniales. También hay que ser crítico. Por un lado, respeto un mundo esa expo del Whitney, las curadoras, pero otro lado es una expo muy blanca.

MGS: esto no es el final. Es más como barley el principio. ¿Por mi parte termine las preguntas, pero si hay algo más que quieras aportar?

CR: ¡perfecto! ¡Todo ok! Y qué bueno que andas pensando en puerto rico como un lugar de posicionamiento estético y decolonial. Importante que otras personas que no sean de puerto rico también lo estén pesando desde afuera también lo digan, lo observen o lo validen. ¡¡¡Buenismo!!!

MGS: quería darle foco a cosas importantes e interesantes que están pasando. Tener un espacio de documentación y tener un espacio para tener records sobre esta región.

B.

Maya Juracan, semi-structured online interview by author,

September 14, 2023

Lisbon, Portugal.

Maria Gabriela Sinclair: Esto más que una entrevista, va a ser una conversación. Para darte un poco de contexto sobre lo que estoy investigando, antes de entrar en tema. Estoy haciendo una tesis en decolonialidad de museos de arte contemporáneo en Centroamérica y el caribe donde estaré haciendo unos casos de estudio sobre Guatemala y Puerto Rico. Quería que fuese un trabajo significativo y que tuviese cierto grado de relación con mi realidad. Decidí dividir mi tesis la dividí en dos partes, la primera mitad enfocada en la teoría y la segunda mitad ya enfocada a los casos de estudio que estoy haciendo.

El primer capítulo de mi tesis está dedicada a los museos. Comienzo con un poco de historia donde explico cómo llegaron a ser los museos que empezaron como estos sitios donde los colonizadores exponía lo que habían robado, pasando por la época de la ilustración donde empezaron a ser espacios donde se le agregan estas características de espacios de conocimiento. Empiezan a crecer y brindar un marco/narrativa para educar a las personas que asistían y como hemos llegado a los museos de arte contemporáneo que son los que me estoy enfocando, que son espacios donde a primera vista no se ve esta historia reflejada. Donde se le quita cualquier señal sobre el tiempo y el espacio, donde tenemos espacios en blanco que pueden ser llenados con cualquier narrativa que uno quiera. Pero esto no significa que estos espacios no tengan sus ligaciones a esa semilla colonial. Que no sea obvio o que no lo podamos ver a primera vez no significa que no estén ahí. Que existan los museos como están estructurados hoy en día es una señal que la colonialidad está viva. El segundo capítulo es mucha teoría. Me estoy basando mucho en la teoría de Aníbal Quijano Walter Mignolo sobre teoría decolonial. En el tercer capítulo trato de unir un poco ambos conceptos y explicar de lo que existe hoy en día esto es más o menos lo que se ve y lo que existe en cuando a decolonialidad en los museos. Para la segunda mitad ya me enfoco en mis casos de estudio porque me gusta mucho la propuesta sobre lo que están haciendo a nivel decolonial. También viendo como las cosas que hablo en la primera mitad se aplican o no a la realidad de esta región. Quería empezar a que me hablaras de tu practica y tus proyectos como lo son la revuelta

Maya Juracan: ¡Primero que nada, Muchas gracias por tomarme en cuenta! ¡Me encanta tu investigación! Yo soy historiadora de carrera y creo que una de las cosas que va alimentando nuestra teoría y nuestros procesos de teoría de critica son la escritura y hay muy pocas curadoras que se dedican a la teoría, filosofía y al arte. Es hora que alguien lo hiciera. También me resulta muy interesante que cada vez que veo este tipo de tesis son mujeres la que escriben entonces va más allá de un proceso personal sino también un proceso colectivo de encontrar estos tipos de memorias ocultos. Soy historiadora de profesión. En Guatemala no existe la carrera de curaduría

ni siquiera existe una carrera formal de historia del arte solo existe profesorado de historia del arte. Yo soy una mujer una mujer, maya, mestiza. Mi mamá es una persona no indígena y mi papa es hombre indígena y a la hora del conflicto armado interno que fue una guerra interna aquí en Guatemala, donde se produjo un genocidio, mi familia exilio a la ciudad y a nosotros se nos crío para ser personas no indígenas. Que es una práctica racista que nos atraviesa mucho. Se nos como el estado nación te cría, se nos cría para ser racistas clasistas y entender todos esos procesos. Pero yo siempre en resistencia o sea veía como mi abuela usaba su traje originario maya. La primera vez que oí a mi abuela hablar en Kaqchikel, que es su idioma ordinario de mi abuela, pensé que estaba hablando en inglés. Y le dije abuelita porque hablas en inglés, porque no sabía nada te crían para que no sepas nada de tus raíces. Yo quería estudiar en la universidad y mi papa decide meterme en una de las universidades más prominentes de Guatemala, con mucho esfuerzo porque mis papas eran comerciantes. Y quería estudiar literatura, moda, pintura, fotografía, pintura todo eso quería estudiar, pero al final la carrera por la que me fui fue profesora de lenguas y literatura, que me encanto y encontré un nicho ahí para poder trabajar de maestra y pagarme mi propia educación. A todo esto, entre muy joven a la universidad, tenía 15 años. Y eso se dio porque mi papa era inmigrante estadounidense y cuando yo iba a los US a visitarlo estudiaba con él y cuando regresaba subía de grado, pero en la literatura entendí muchísimas cosas porque no era como que iba a graduarme de literata sino iba a graduarme de como enseñar literatura y la historia de la misma y en eso descubrí lo fabuloso que era la historia y comienzo a investigar historia, encuentro en el arte una manera de encontrar herramientas de historias no dichas. Porque hay una pieza hermosa de Diego Rivera que cuenta la historia de la revolución y de la contrarrevolución en Guatemala y entonces todas esas historias y esos textos no existían porque estábamos bajo un proceso muy silenciado de lo que era la historia de Guatemala. y yo daba clases para estudiantes entre 13 y 15 años y me daba cuenta que no tenía texto para enseñarles y los que existían tenían una perspectiva liberal entonces tomo todas las piezas de arte de artistas de pos guerra piezas de diego rivera, realismo social, etc. para empezar a contar las historias del país de resistencia y para esta altura yo tenía 18 años y mis alumnos casi tenían mi edad *risas* y ahí es donde me doy cuenta el poder que tenía el arte visual y es donde decido encaminar mi carrera al arte visual y me fui a estudiar arte contemporáneo en Sevilla con apoyo de unas becas y gestión cultural. El análisis de mi trabajo nunca fue el arte por el arte mi trabajo fue el análisis de que piezas podían ayudar a la resistencia. Aquí en el 2022, a todo esto, te hablo que el conocimiento de que era un curador, no sabía. En el 2011 creo un proyecto que se llama proyecto 44 que buscaba contar la historia de la revolución en Guatemala a través del arte. Yo estaba contando historias... yo no sabía que era la curaduría en si, por lo que hago es una convocatoria para artista que quieran hablar de la revolución y selecciono artistas y monto una exposición junto a otro profesor de historia que hablaba sobre este tema. Entonces estaba siendo curadora porque monto una exhibición, hago un texto (curatorial) pero no lo sabía. En el 2015, pasa la situación donde un presidente cae preso en Guatemala y me dio cuenta que proyecto 44 le estaba contando esta historia a la gente que ya la sabia entonces decido sacar proyecto 44 a las calles y empiezo este proyecto como arte (inaudible). Entonces colocamos 3mil soldaditos de plástico afuera del palacio nacional el 20 de oct "... ahh eso es por la revolución" y

ahí empiezo a explorar todo lo que es arte contemporáneo y me empiezo a dar cuenta que lo hago entra bajo ese parámetro y ahí empiezo a acompañarme de artistas pos guerra que ya trabajaban estas herramientas” pero también me doy cuenta que no hay nadie como yo en el sistema. Que no hay nadie mestizo, que no había estudiado arte como tal, la mayoría eran personas muy blancas y no me sentía representada entonces empiezo a trabajar en un lugar que me enseñó mucho y que hasta el día de hoy todavía colaboro con ellos que es la casa de la memoria. La casa de la memoria tiene una historia bien particular porque son una organización CALDH. Que es una organización que comisiona ... los derechos humanos CALDH fueron los que llevaron al juicio por genocidio y lo ganaron en Guatemala. ellos tienen una casa contando la historia de Guatemala a través, no de piezas de artes, ellos trabajaron con una agencia de publicidad para hacerla entonces me digo a mí misma, yo puedo hacer más y les hablo y empezamos a trabajar juntos y ahí me topo con una curadora que se llama Anabela Acevedo y que juntas empezamos a trabajar un archivo fotográfico que tenía CALDH que eran fotografías que contaban la historia de Guatemala en época de guerra y que habían servido para que el juicio por genocidio se diera. Entonces todo lo que hacía iba dirigido a la política y a la resistencia.

Entre mucho de otros proyectos que trabaje, trabaje con las mujeres víctimas de violencia de sexual. Me pidieron escribir un texto, pero yo no me sentía cómoda. Hablando con ellas, les pregunte si querían que en verdad hiciera esto y ellas me dijeron que sí, para que no vuelva a pasar y ese “para que no vuelva a pasar” fue como la energía para yo seguir comunicando estas luchas sociales. Me digo “¿para qué? Para que no vuelva a pasar”. Así empecé, pero después ya entro al 91 mundo del arte como una curadora y no me gusta. No me gusta el modelo no me gusta la forma se me hace sumamente violento y además como no aceptado y explotador y nosotros permitimos esta explotación porque nos gusta. El museo no deja de ser ... la curaduría como dos vertientes, la francófona contar una curaduría de las ganancias y la anglosajona de un genuino interés por que la gente conozca. El interés era que se condujera procesos sociales resistencia sociales. Empiezo a trabajar en la colección de la fundación Paiz, que me di cuenta que no quería trabajar con una colección. Fundación Paiz tenía sesgos racistas, clasistas pero que tampoco quería renunciar a un trabajo que me había ganado. Que estaba hecha para eso. Empiezo a despatriarcalizar la mirada y descolonizar el ojo. Como voy a juzgar el pasado con estos ojos feministas, descolonizados, despatriarcalizados, y una de las herramientas que use fue no meter nada debajo de la alfombra. Si tenemos piezas que son racistas vamos a hablar sobre ello y no voy a ocultar nada y creo que una de las cosas bien importantes para mí fue utilizar esta herramienta que todos estos centros de formación artísticas como museos me invitaba siempre a trabajar con ellos. Los espacios te invitan para que hables, pero no ensanchan no abren el camino. Tu como persona racializada, tu como mujer, tu como cuerpo diverso tienes que entrar en el espacio que ellos hacen, pero no están abriéndolo que no están haciendo y te obligan a entrar en eso, pero no cambian nada, la estructura sigue igual, los procesos siguen igual. Te conocen, pero la puerta sigue siendo del mismo tamaño y si por la puerta me costó a mí entrar entonces le va a costar entrar a más personas como yo. El término que use es un LAX porque eso es lo que ustedes (los museos) no dan. Quieren que pasemos, pero no nos dan las herramientas para transitar o quieren que pasemos en este puente

donde solo pasan carros y no se puede caminar, pero yo vengo caminando. En educación fue diferente porque el contexto es diferente y entendía que la idea del museo es un ejercicio aspiracional. Un ejercicio de poder un ejercicio blanco que está contando la historia del arte y los procesos sociales del arte a través de una sola mirada. Entonces yo ya no creo en la historia del arte, pero en las historias del arte. Esto es un gran camino y largo camino de descubrimiento

Activamos un desvergue en esa bienal (bienal de arte Paiz) y coloco como artista a un pueblo entero que es el pueblo Zumpango, una comunidad maya, porque me decía si hay tantos artistas extranjeros porque no puedo artistas de la comunidad. Entonces ya entendí el arte, que es arte que no es arte y legitimar arte nada más a un objeto entendí que para el arte es un acontecimiento social. Todo lo que acontece socialmente lo voy a denominar arte. Entonces coloco a Zumpango como artistas de una bienal y coloco a H.I.J.O.S y coloco una sede completa con ellos y en el momento se me crítico mucho porque en lugar de “hablar del artista” guatemalteco meto estos proyectos que “no son arte”. ¿Y esa frase me da las herramientas para apuntar “entonces para ti que es arte?” si arte no son nuestros pueblos originarios, si arte no son las herramientas de dolor entonces tú no estás hablando de un arte contextual tú estás hablando de un arte aspiracional. Vendría a dividir el camino para poder nombrar lo que yo hacía desde mis propias necesidades contextuales y muy honestas con los procesos sociales que había vivido en PAIZ todo. Después de la bienal de arte Paiz yo hago un argumento gigante en mi mente y en mi corazón y decido como no quiero ser entonces los hago un monumento a los curadores que yo no quería ser, a las personas racistas dentro del espacio que no quería, les hago un monumento a las instituciones y aunque talvez no sabía que era lo que quería ser, sabía que era lo que NO quería se. No quería hacerlo a través de una violencia sistémica, a través de los usos del poder, a través de machismos etc... y el digo a una amiga si hacemos una bienal. Entonces le hablo a un amigo, que yo vengo la escena punk guatemalteca, y mi amigo tocaba en esta punk conmigo y ahora entiendo porque mi papa siempre dice que soy naturalmente rebelde y entiendo que en mi naturaleza esta la búsqueda de la dignidad, y la dignidad no me la da el país ni el estado, no me la da el museo, la sociedad. Le digo a mi amigo oye qué tal si hacemos un proyecto, pero como una bienal una bienal que va a utilizar todos los recursos de una bienal, pero la vamos a contextualizar. Eso quiere decir que vamos a entender que el objetivo de la bienal es entender la realidad que si los museos y la idea de los museos se hubiesen creado en Latinoamérica no hubiesen sido como uno lo piensa como son hoy en día. Y vamos a entender los procesos lo que va a ser una bienal sin un cubo blanco. Que no exista, que el arte no pueda ser representado nada más en estos espacios. Y decidimos crear le pusimos “la bienal en resistencia” una bienal que contextualizaba las necesidades del territorio de Guatemala. cosas que aquí en Guatemala no se reconocen. Era la primera vez que nosotros nos planteábamos la idea para construir teoría del arte desde este territorio desde nuestra responsabilidad como sujetos políticos. Entonces la bienal en resistencia no puede tener un curador, como hacer para que no sea la clásica donde la gente llega tomar una copa de vino a ver arte. Cuando la gente afuera se está muriendo y ahí le digo es que no va a ver afuera y no va a ver

adentro. Porque todo lo que pase dentro de la bienal de resistencia es de calle. Y me topo con el texto de María Lugones 'callejeras' y fue así que iba a ser una bienal callejera. Y no había una figura del curador. El curador no puede existir lo que íbamos a hacer era una curaduría comunitaria que iba defender por sobre todas las cosas a las personas y reconocer a todas las personas como sujetas políticas. Y que íbamos a invitar a artistas, íbamos a invitar a curadores, pero que no iban a dar su punto de vista, sino que nosotros íbamos a involucrarlos en nuestro contexto. Entonces en la curaduría comunitaria funciona donde cada uno cree en cada una de las personas como sujetas políticas por otra parte son líderes de opinión en sus propios contextos. Desde la contadora que está en el proyecto, ella iba a decidir que pieza que surgía de su propia casa. Entonces no nos iban a resolver procesos estilísticos, pero procesos de comprensión de la obra, procesos de entendimiento. En la primera bienal de resistencia tuvimos un biólogo un artista, tuvimos de curador a Daniel Garza que fue el curador de FEMSA México, y después viene a la bienal donde viene montar con nosotros y apoyarnos... fue hermoso. Otra curadora fue Hilaria Conte que después de ir a los museos más grandes del mundo se sienta a comer un tamal con nosotros en las calles porque ahí hicimos la inauguración. Cargando ollas de fresco para que todos pudiéramos tomar era como extraño. Y ellos los solo los conocías por textos. Entonces te cambiaba el corazón y la manera de ver las cosas. Eliminamos procesos de montaje de estilización, los protocolos curatoriales y que se sintiese la esencia del arte centroamericana (una de las reglas era que no iban a poner artistas estadounidenses porque no les toca, todos los artistas son latinoamericanos). Por otra de las reglas era que como bienal no somos responsables de hacer tu obra. Porque algo que había vivió en arte Paiz era que artistas exigían que se les hiciera sus productos y en este caso no ya que somos cómplices corresponsables de trabajar en colectivo para que tu resistencia se nombre. Otra regla es que no íbamos a utilizar artistas que se apoderen de las luchas sociales para contarlas en el mundo del arte. Vamos a trabajar con artistas que acuerden las luchas sociales. Eran artistas que ya eran activistas. Que ya habían luchado de antes o que no eran artistas sino activistas habiendo producciones artísticas. Otra cosa que no íbamos a pedir tu CV o portfolio. Eso no importaba porque entendíamos la lucha de la academia en Guatemala. Y eso a ha sido un gran fortalecimiento, pero también desde mi área feminista también empecé a trabajar con las mujeres tomando en cuenta como se me trataba a mí en el arte. Las violencias que yo sufría en el ambiente y cuando miraba a otras mujeres entrar en el mundo del arte yo decía pues que no se junte con este artista o que no haga tal cosa porque ya yo sabía las violencias a las que iba a ser sometida. Yo tenía de referencia a Regina José Galindo que era una mujer recia y daba miedo. Con el tiempo ya entendí porque era así porque tenía que ser así con esta realidad y me doy cuenta del machismo y empiezo a trabajar una tesis curatorial alrededor de despatriarcalizar las miradas. Porque las mujeres empiezan tarde en el mundo arte. En una entrevista de arte me preguntas y cuál será la Picasso guatemalteca sentí un enojo en mi pecho. En pandemia, doy una clase que se llama las mujeres en el arte guatemalteco, esta clase partía de mi tesis. Se conectan 160 mujeres a la clase y al final de la clase una de ellas y me dice "muy buena información, pero ¿qué podemos hacer para contar estas historias y que no vengan desde la visión masculina?" Y yo digo "nada de nosotras sin nosotras" si van a contar nuestras historias pues íbamos a ser nosotras presentes. Ella me habla

después de la clase para decirme que tenía un proyecto que se llamaba Resister”, que era un periodismo de mujeres y me dice quiero usar tu frase para hacer playeras y ponerla en todas partes y luego quiero saber qué más podemos hacer y las involucro a todas en un proyecto curatorial, y dije si me quieren ayudar, yo les enseño a todos y ya en el proyecto les dije que el mundo del arte es tan violento porque es un pastel grande y todos quieren un pedazo pero nosotras vamos a enseñarle a todas a hacer pasteleras y nunca más vamos a pelear por un trabajo y empezamos a aprender juntas e intercambiar conocimientos. Y yo pensaba en la Revuelta. Como la niña que le da la vuelta al columpio y retrocede el tiempo. Una revuelta a las cosas, al sistema, muestra conciencia y planteamos ideales, no vamos a reproducir violencia. No somos un espacio seguro porque al afirmar que los somos es un dogma y eso solo hace el machismo. Nosotras somos un espacio en constante cuestionamiento y vamos a cuestionar una y otra vez si somos violentas y si los somos cambiamos el sistema. Decir que somos un espacio seguro viene del privilegio. No vamos a contratar a ningún hombre y cuando nos digas que no hay una mujer que trabaje en el área pues íbamos a ir a buscarla aquí y en cualquier lado. Como vamos a plantear el autocuidado, cuantos días a la semana vamos a trabajar cuanto presupuesto vamos a gastar en esto, cuantas expos anuales – 2023, entonces plantear la revuelta me ha dado las herramientas para sistematizar producciones curatoriales feministas, no solo con el nombre feminista sino utilizar las herramientas para cambiar las estructuras. Deconstruir las estructuras que ya existían. ¿Como sería una curadora feminista? ¿un espacio feminista? ¿cómo decoraríamos? ¿Plantear el goce como una herramienta de aprendizaje y no como un espacio de ocio? Vamos a ser felices aquí y en el momento que no lo seamos nos vamos y eso plantea la intergeneracionalidad y los vacíos porque entiendo que la revuelta tiene un principio y un fin para mí y que yo al terminar la revuelta me voy, pero vienen otras. Todas ganamos el mismo sueldo, no hay jerarquía todas ejercemos las mismas funciones.

En este tiempo de mi vida me dedico a la educación soy profesora en la universidad historias del arte contemporánea y me mude al campo para trabajar con las comunidades.

MGS: la bandera decolonial la llevan las personas y las comunidades que se cuidan entre sí y son uno con su espacio. Y estamos superando ese cosmopolitismo de “y el siguiente Picasso” “el MET latinoamericano” nosotros tenemos nuestras propias cosas y no necesitamos de eso. Muchas gracias por compartir tu tiempo y conocimiento.

MJ: para terminar, podría decirte como esta frase que repetimos “nosotros no queremos inclusión, queremos insurrección” los espacios reconozcan las violencias sistémicas que nos han sometido históricamente porque nadie nos está incluyendo son espacios que se nos han negado por tema de género, racial, colonialismo, creo que eso te puede ayudar a cerrar esta discusión que tienes.