Slide 1: Text

Text Reads: Rhyming Through Disaster: Community Organizing and Displacement in Puerto Rico and New York after Hurricane Maria

LSU Dissertation Defense by Melinda González

Image contains a broad purple border across the top of the screen. Within it is a human skull, person in indigenous feathered costume, row housing, view of the island of Puerto Rico from the sky and view of the island from a digital globe.

Slide 2: Text

Text reads Visual and Hearing Accessibility Aids available at: melindagonzalezphd.com

Slide 3: Video

Video begins with a content warning as graphic images will be shown. This is followed with images of flooded roads, fallen trees, destroyed homes, and people organizing after Hurricane Maria. Each image corresponds to the words being spoken. Closed captioning of the poems by poets Ketsia Ramos and Ana Portnoy Brimmer are on the bottom of the screen in Spanish and English.

Slide 4: Text and Image

Large text across the top of the slide reads “Hurricane Maria over Puerto Rico Sept 20, 2017”. Beneath it is a Heat Map displaying the large swirling red intense image of Hurricane Maria atop the island of Puerto Rico.

Slide 5: Text

Text boxes of four newspaper headlines

1. “How colonialism and racism explain the inept US response to Hurricane Maria”
2. The Jones Act” The Law Strangling Puerto Rico
3. A controversial ‘oversight board’ could take over Puerto Rico’s hurricane rebuilding effort”
4. How Puerto Rico’s Debt Created A Perfect Storm Before the Storm

Slide 6: Images

Text Reads “Donald Trump” Puerto Rico Want’s ‘Everything to be Done for Them’

1st image shows President Trump in a press conference throwing a roll of paper towels like a basketball.

2nd image shows President Trump sitting at a desk during a press conference. His eyes closed, mouth open, hair piece askew answering questions
Slide 7: Text
“El desastre real es el colonialismo.” ‡ “The real disaster is colonialism.”

Slide 8: Text
Central Question What happens to a place that’s already in a state of disaster when a catastrophic weather event occurs?

Slide 9: Text
Question Breakdown
What is a disaster? How do people respond to disasters? Whose bodies bear the brunt of disasters? What are local theories of disaster? What are the structural elements that contribute to disaster situations?

Slide 10: Text
Research Methods
• Conducted in-person and digital research between May 2017 and September 2019
• Sites: Puerto Rico; New York City; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
• Semi-structured interviews with 60 people
• Poets, community organizers, artists, displaced people, disaster recovery services, and their friends/colleagues
• Life history interviews with 8 people
• Analyzed poems and art

Slide 11: Text

So, Maria = trigger of disaster.

Slide 12: Text
ReThinking Disaster. Hurricane Maria “Does not Equal” Trigger. Hurricane Maria was the great revealer” of the continuous disaster already existing in Puerto Rico.

Slide 13: Text and Image
Image shows a rudimentary drawing of the united states with fireworks and a metal chain linking it to the island of Puerto Rico. Text reads “The Land of the Free”
Chapter 1, Introduction

• Breakdown of U.S.-colonial relationship to PR

• Layout theories on disasters, identity, diaspora, and nonsovereign politics (Bonilla 2015)

• Methods

• Contributions

**Slide 14: Text and Image**

Image shows a Facebook screenshot containing a vintage photograph of a smiling couple. The post creator is hoping to find missing loved ones in a Hurricane Maria Recover/ Relief/ Support group.

Text reads: Chapter 2, Organizing on Facebook as Disaster Recovery

• Facebook = primary site of organizing right after Maria

• People searched for relatives (as seen in picture on Left)

• Shared information about life post-hurricane

• Raised funds for disaster recovery

• Collected goods and resources

• Facebook served as a bridge across the ‘big water’

**Slide 15: Text and Image**

Image shows a pamphlet for Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon a poetry project and sticker for with the shape of Puerto Rico which says Decolonizar a Puerto Rico, Repeal the Jones Act, Cancel the Debt!

Text Reads: Chapter 3, Poetry as Disaster Recovery

• Examine role of poets, poetry, and poetry spaces in disaster recovery across New York, Puerto Rico, and digital space

• Analyze poems written after Hurricane Maria

• Gentrification limited disaster recovery in poetry spaces across the diaspora

• Note: All study participants connected to the Capicu Cultural Showcase of Brooklyn, New York.
Slide 16: Text and Image

Image shows a grey and white map of the United States displaying red trajectories of where evacuees traveled upon leaving the Main Island of Puerto Rico.

Text Reads: Chapter 4, Migration as Disaster Recovery

- Debunk myths about displaced families
- “Evacuees” were often most marginalized – houseless, elderly, sick, LGBTQI, unemployed youth, and single mothers
- Experienced hyper-marginalization and further abandonment upon migrating
- Largely ignored in post-Maria discourses

Slide 17: Text and Image

Image is a photograph of a graphited wall in Puerto Rico. Tags reads Despierta, Libertad, Gobierno Genocida nos Matan nos roban”

Text Reads:

Chapter 5, Disaster, Recovery, & Sovereignty in Puerto Rico

- Focused on Puerto Ricans who lived in PR during and after Maria
- PR-based recovery efforts and displacement
- Local theories of disaster
- Non-sovereign politics (Bonilla 2015) = “freedoms” without formal independence
- Hopes for Puerto Rico’s future
- #RickyRenuncia
- Asambleas de Pueblo

Slide 18: Text and Image

Image 1 is a drawing of the main Island with a large cluster of red dots near Ponce. This is the area hardest hit by earthquakes in 2019 & 2020

Image 2 is a drawing of the Island with heat mapping ranging from white to red displaying the areas where cases of Covid 19 were most prevalent.

Text Reads: Since Hurricane Maria Hundreds of Earthquakes in 2019 and 2020 which left hundreds without homes and electricity. COVID-19 Global Pandemic case prevalence as of July 2020
Slide 19: Text

Text Reads: Contributions Anthropology

- adds to theories of disasters, including local definitions of disaster
- highlights the processes that create disasters
- case study of hurricane survival in U.S. colonies
- Brings together theories of disaster, sovereignty, and poetic arts movements
- show how people engage in disaster recovery in the face of government and social abandonment
- increases understanding of how diasporas form connections through artistic practices in moments of environmental crisis
- highlights the role of digital ethnography and social media on disaster recovery

Slide 20: Text

Contributions To Research Participants

- project shaped by conversations with participants
- centers local theories and knowledges
- Focus on marginalized Puerto Ricans
  - Black Puerto Ricans
  - Immigrant Puerto Ricans
  - LGBTQI Puerto Ricans
  - Divorced Women
  - Single Mothers
- First study of displaced populations in New York after Hurricane Maria
- Engage in intellectual and artistic exchange and community organizing
- Raise awareness of conditions in PR community
Slide 21: Text

Future Work

• **Publications**
  - Convert dissertation to book with minor updates (i.e. 2020 earthquakes and COVID-19)
  - Publish Four Articles in Academic Journals
    - ethnographic experiences of displaced Puerto Ricans
    - role of poetry-based organizing in addressing ongoing mental health crises for hurricane survivors
    - methods pieces on digital ethnography and disasters
    - methods piece focused on increasing accessibility within anthropology for underrepresented scholars, such as myself

• **Research**
  - Further scholarship on environmental crises and impacts on oppressed peoples
    - Short-term project on persistent mental health impacts and PTSD amongst Hurricane Maria survivors in Puerto Rico
  - Next Project: Water Contamination Crises across cities in the U.S.

Slide 22: Text

Thank you!

To my daughter, mother, sister, and brother. <3

Micha Rahder, Joyce M. Jackson, Kerry Ryan Chance, and Susan D. Weinstein, Gracias a todxs que me permitieron entrevistarlxs, seguirlxs y conversar con ellxs durante mis dos años de investigación etnográfica. Sin ustedes, este proyecto no existiría; Ruth Figueroa, Ana Portnoy Brimmer, Maritza Polanco, Juan “Papo Swiggity” Santiago, Kimberly Andino, Celia Margarita Ayala, Lilah Mejia, everyone at The Capicu Cultural Showcase, the staff at NYDIS, Aimee Montoya, Cetah Treadwell, Iris Morales, Bianca N. Martinez, Jasmine Castillo, Max Vega, Tato Torres, George “Urban Jibaro” Torres, Melissa Castillo-Planas, Melissa Colon, Gloria Colom, Julissa Gonzalez Santiago, Karla Ayala, Willie Perdono, Raquel Z. Rivera; Tina Marie Dominguez, Sarah Serrano-Esquilin, Ana Portnoy Brimmer, Ketsia Ramos, Noel Quiñones, Siloé Andino, Nia Andino, Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez, Nancy Mercado, Chilo Cajigas, and Raquel Acevedo Klein, Iris Kaifa, Phyllis Johnson, Goran Jagetić, SK Groll, Kobi Ann Weaver, Jasmine Pogue, Anna-Claire Simpson, Lauren Hull, Alexia Arani, Adrianna Garriga-Lopez, G.

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**Slide 23: Text**

Text reads, Questions?