Painting Identity and Resistance:
Muralism in Puerto Rico

by
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Abstract

The mural Grabadores por Grabadores (Printmakers for Printmakers) existed as a popular wall in the city of San Juan. The group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia transformed it into La Puerta (The Door) to oppose the imposition of Bill H.R 5278, better known as PROMESA. This study analyzes the reception to both murals and discusses whether Grabadores por Grabadores existed as a site of identity, while La Puerta exists as a site of resistance. Employing Armando Silva’s concept of exhibición, encuadre y mirada ciudadana this work unveils how the artists exposed their imaginario urbano. It also examines the perceived impact of the transformation on Puerto Rican citizenship, focusing on whether the murals existed as sites of identity, resistance, neither, or both.

**Keywords**: mural; identity; resistance; Puerto Rico; La Puerta; Grabadores por Grabadores; PROMESA; colonialism
Dedication

A Jaileen, Erolivia y Edwin.
Acknowledgements

Simon Fraser University is located on traditional First Nations lands, I want to acknowledge the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples on whose traditional territories I was privileged to live, work, study and play.
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Chapter 1. Muralism: Of walls, cities, and imaginaries.

When visiting a city, I am guided by the urban art it displays. The stencils, wheat paste posters, stickers, mosaics, graffiti, murals and other types of street art that dress a city are manifestations of the people for the people. They represent a museum open to everyone, where artists embed their hopes and dreams in their work for other civilians to see. In this sense, urban art represents a potent method of communication. Although this type of art can be ignored or erased, its ephemeral nature does not diminish its importance as a presentation of reality. My research project seeks to understand how the Puerto Rican citizenship reacted to the transformation of a mural. I look at how an artistic group in the archipelago of Puerto Rico used the transformation of a wall to start a dialogue about the current political situation. This research looks at the intentions of the transformation from Grabadores por Grabadores to La Puerta and the effects of such change on Puerto Ricans. This change in the mural is a testament to the idea that cities assemble urban imaginaries (Silva, 1992). Urban imaginaries encounter, challenge and coexist with each other in urban spaces. These imaginaries present different points of view and possible paradigms, they diversify the milieu. The mural of study is not only an urban imaginary; it is a political and cultural work of art. I argue that the mural Grabadores por Grabadores existed as a site of identity. The current version of the mural, La Puerta was created as an artistic response to the imposition of Bill H.R 5278 and I state that it represents a site of resistance. Additionally, the trajectory of this mural illustrates the communicative, social and political potential of muralism.

In this project, I focus on murals and have yet to encounter a definition that encompasses the variety of purposes and techniques muralist have used or use to this day. I define murals as large scale paintings or installations. They can be located indoors or outdoors and can be created using a wide variety of materials, not limited to paint. Additionally, they are not exclusive to walls as they can be put up on other surfaces or transported from one place to another. Murals can be created by members of a community, skilled artists, novice artists and/or children. They can also be funded by governmental organizations, private investors and others. They are created with a variety of purposes: to embellish a place, to cover graffiti, to attract customers, to create
a space of significance, among others. Cockcroft, Weber and Cockcroft identified two directions in mural painting: community based and urban-environmental (Cockcroft, Weber, & Cockcroft, 1977). Although the mural Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta were not created by members of the community, it coincides with Cockcroft, Weber and Cockcroft definition of a community based mural. Both versions of the mural are “concerned with the environment, have a rationale of working for the local audience around issues that concern the immediate community, using art as a medium of expression of, for and with the local audience” (Cockcroft, Weber, & Cockcroft, 1977, p. 30).

Urban art, and murals specifically, have proven to be beneficial for cities and communities. Murals have been used to immortalize neighborhood heroes and to challenge disdainful representations of cultural groups (Moss, 2010). They have served as memorial sites to honour and mourn victims of violence (Lohman, 2001). Works of urban art aid in the process of “inscribing our collective ideas onto the walls of the cities where we concentrate our lives and lived experience” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 10). Art is transformative; murals, in turn, can transform spaces into meaningful sites that embellish the physical but prove to be useful for the community in which they are located. Murals are historical, they can assemble and present perspectives of a period in time.

Muralism has had a lengthy tradition in Latin-America. The work of “Los Tres Grandes” established murals as a socio-political art form (Coffey, 2012). The work of Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros deployed the political and social possibilities of muralism. In Mexico, murals were used to immortalize an era and to construct and unify the country after one of its major armed struggles (Indych-López, 2009). The murals of Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros served many purposes: historicizing the heroes and hardships of the Mexican revolution, exalting Mexican indigenous culture and emphasizing the oppressive role of the working class in a capitalist system (Indych-López, 2009; Coffey, 2012). The work of these three artists established the era of Mexican muralism and deployed the political element of the medium. “Los Tres Grandes” developed the art form, and challenged museum practices and exhibition styles (Coffey, 2012). The work of Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros was pivotal in the promotion of muralism and inspired movements throughout Latin America and the United States.
In Chile, the Brigada Ramona Parra (BPR) took the city of Santiago as an arena for murals in support of Salvador Allende presidency for the election of 1970. In order to avoid the authorities, members of the BPR mastered a novel technique that allowed them to create murals rapidly (Trumper, 2016). Although their technique was impressive, their message was the focal point. The BPR painted slogans like: “Another Chile is possible”, “Let’s build a new Chile” and “Vote for Allende” (Trumper, 2016). After the death of Allende and the coup d’état on 1973, the subsequent military rule of Augusto Pinochet severely repressed murals. Urban art was criminalized and murals of the BPR were white washed (Trumper, 2016). In contemporary Chile, muralists paint to remember the heroes and victims of the Pinochet regime, for the advocacy of women’s rights, for the rights of indigenous communities like the Mapuche and to celebrate and foster resistance (Rolston, 2011). In Chile and throughout the Americas, murals have proven to be places of remembrance, celebration, and debate.

Urban art is more than inscriptions and paintings on walls. They portray urban imaginaries that present alternate ways of living in a city. Armando Silva is a Colombian philosopher, semiologist and scholar that created and developed the concept of urban imaginaries. As Silva sought for commonalities between cities like Barcelona, São Paulo and Bogotá, he encountered that they host a variety of urban imaginaries. These collective representations of the world are evocations, dreams, and mentalities of a city. Urban imaginaries are born, constructed and reinvented by the citizen (Silva, 1992). This alludes to more than the physical space that cities occupy, but ways of perceiving and acting within them. Urban imaginaries reflect what citizens want their city to be and the way in which they express these desires. Along the same lines, Justin Armstrong’s discussion of street art defines this art form as a vehicle of resistance that is significant in the imagination of the urban citizen and her milieu (Armstrong, 2006). In his essay “The Contested Gallery: Street art, ethnography and the search for urban understandings”, Armstrong expressed: “Street art of today may not maintain the same kind of violent resistance toward specific apparatus (the police, the state), however, it does however hold a kind of subtle and subversive influence on the urban imagination” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 7). Both Silva and Armstrong emphasize the importance of the imagined in how we create and live in a city.

In my study, the selected murals in Puerto Rico are seen as expressions of urban imaginaries. I present how Puerto Rican artists are using their work to raise awareness
about the current political and social situation of the islands, as a device to condemn colonialism. Through the study of the mural Grabadores por Grabadores and its transformation to La Puerta, I will discuss these places as more than spaces, but rather as sites of identity and resistance. My research situates muralism as a powerful medium of communication, impactful in the life of the citizen.

As a Colombian-born Puerto Rican who has resided in the archipelago for the majority of her life; I find myself uniquely positioned to produce research on political muralism in Puerto Rico. Primarily because I recognize, follow and have experienced how the work of urban artist is a meaningful tactic in the changing and fast paced political environment of the islands. Additionally, because while in the diaspora I have had the opportunity to revisit this knowledge with a new perspective and contrast it to urban art in other parts of the world. Scholarship on muralism keeps expanding and my work intends to add to the literature that analyses this artistic technique. Ultimately, it seeks to reiterate the power of muralism as political expressions and urban imaginaries.

Puerto Rican Muralism

It must be stated that the murals examined in this study are not the first nor the only notable mural in Puerto Rico. Local artists like Lear with the Barriada Morales in Caguas and Edgardo Lagerri with Coco D’ Oro in La Perla have integrated graffiti and muralism to community projects (Fonseca Barahona, 2016). These initiatives have used urban art as tools to educate participants artistically and to express and promote the culture of the community (Romero, 2008). Students of the Rio Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico have painted murals denouncing the problematics of our political status for years. At this university, murals have been used in strikes to inform the student body, promote solidarity and foster a collective identity within the student movement (Everhart, 2012). Female muralist like Sofia Maldonado, Elizabeth Barreto, Veronica Rivera, and Rosenda Alvarez have emerged to enrich the tradition with their prowess while accentuating female representation in the field. Murals have been used in Puerto Rico to promote ecological responsibility and as methods for salvaging our history and heritage (Hernandez Rivera, 2016; Fonseca Barahona, 2016). Mural Festivals in Puerto Rico such as “Los Muros Hablan” and “Santurce es Ley” have fostered artistic awareness in the public and provided artistic value to our cities (Fonseca Barahona, 2016). Our capital city of San Juan has been named one of the cities to visit
for prominent and political urban art (Waterson, 2014; Gardiner, 2016). However, the use of murals to communicate Puerto Rican issues has not been limited to local walls in the territory. Diasporic Puerto Rican artists have employed street art to bring attention to our colonial status, in cities like New York and Philadelphia (Hernández, 2005). Puerto Rican muralism has advanced the notion of public art transnationally.

In his book “Puerto Rico: Open Air Museum”, Fonseca Barahona recognizes that our capital city exists as a mecca of local and international muralism (Fonseca Barahona, 2016). Romero argues that urban art in Puerto Rico is a democratic act that serves to reclaim spaces and articulate identity (Romero, 2008). Murals are artistic, political and cultural expressions, all at the same time. They seek to appeal to the general citizenship but also challenge beliefs and ideas. Scholar Hernandez Rivera defines murals as an “instrument that denounces political injustice and the existing social condition of the country, a revolutionary and educative tool to perpetuate or change history” (Hernandez Rivera, 2016, p. 12). This definition stresses the role of murals in spurring an ideological shift, one that creates ripples both artistic and ideologically. In this research study, I examine if this was the case for the murals Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta. However, before embarking on the discussion of the artworks, it is critical to situate this examination against the backdrop of Puerto Rico’s history. It is pivotal to comprehend who we have been to fully understand where we stand today.
Chapter 2. Historical Background

Puerto Rico is an archipelago composed of 143 islands, atolls, islets and cays. It is located in between the Dominican Republic and the Virgin Islands. Positioned in the middle of the Caribbean, our main island meets the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Caribbean Sea to the south. In 1520, Spanish royal official Baltasar de Castro described Puerto Rico as the door of navigation to the Indies (Morales Carrión, 1995); the connecting point between Spain and its overseas territories. It is located in a “privileged maritime trade zone” an asset that has yet to be exploited (Collado-Schawarz, Catalá-Oliveras, & Lara, 2012).

The discovery of pottery on the island confirms the existence of a native population since 200 BC. The Taino peoples have been studied through the physical remains they left and the written records produced by the Spaniards during the colonization process. Tainos lived in small groups, were politically structured, participated in religious ceremonies, and relied on agriculture. (Picó, 1986). The Taino name for the main island was Borikén, a term that has been translated and is commonly used today: Borinquen.

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493 defined the beginning of a new era of colonization. The Spanish conquest focused primarily on the extraction of gold, later on agriculture and cattle ranching. To complete the work, Spaniards relied heavily on slavery. The involuntary African population entered the workforce while the Taino population decreased rapidly due to the grating work conditions, changes in their diet, and low immunity to foreign diseases. By 1531 the Africans surpassed the Taino and Spanish population, natives were exterminated not long after (Pico, 1986).

Puerto Rico mainly exported sugar, leather, tobacco, and ginger, but the more transited docks on nearby islands and high costs of production challenged the establishment of a stable economy. Another obstacle to the development of a healthy Puerto Rican economy was the lack of jurisdiction. The monarchs of Spain dictated from afar while ignoring the claims and requests of Puerto Ricans. It was not until the Spanish Constitution of 1812 that Puerto Ricans began to experience participation in political life.
The Royal Decree of Graces of 1815 permitted free commerce with the surrounding Antilles and opened the door to legal trade with the United States. As Spanish control over its colonies in the Americas deteriorated, the United States began to assert its influence in the region. The Treaty of Paris signed at the culmination of the Spanish-American War in 1898 ceded Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States. This marks the beginning of the second colonial period for the archipelago.

The North American mandate brought many reforms. The American dollar became the official currency. The Foraker Act of 1900 structured the Puerto Rican government in 3 branches of power that remain in effect today—judicial, executive and legislative. Puerto Ricans were given the right to vote for representation in the legislative body. However, the governor and the members of his cabinet were elected by the president of the U.S. and ratified by the U.S. Senate. Ultimately, the decisions taken by local leaders could also be vetoed by the U.S. government.

The Jones Act superseded the Foraker Act on 1917. It granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans and the ability to vote for more representation on a local Senate. The governor was still chosen by U.S. officials until an amendment on 1948 granted Puerto Ricans the chance to vote for their first elected governor. Another ordinance of the Jones Act was the establishment of cabotage laws. These shipping and trade regulations established that trade must exclusively take place with U.S. flagged ships and vessels owned and manufactured in the U.S. For an archipelago, the access, and control of its ports is a necessary economic tool. Restricting access to the sea that surrounds it limits the opportunities for development and closes the door to neighboring countries. As a result, local political and economic institutions continued to remain weak. The cabotage laws remain until present times.

The first governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín sought to resolve the uncertain status of Puerto Rico. In 1952 Puerto Ricans voted for the Estado Libre Asociado (Commonwealth) in a referendum that was later ratified by the U.S. Congress. This Estado Libre Asociado established that Puerto Rico would have a government with self-governing concepts while agreeing to a junction with the United States. It bound the two countries in a commonwealth relationship that gave Puerto Rico the status of unincorporated territory (Picó, 1986). Given that the Estado Libre Asociado promoted a self-government through a relationship of mutual agreement, the United Nations
determined Puerto Rico to be an autonomous political entity. With the approval of Resolution 748, Puerto Rico was no longer deemed a colony and removed from the list of Non-Self Governing Territories. This decision may have removed the title, but Puerto Rico has yet to experience the sovereignty of a nation-state.

The archipelago has never obtained independence. During a revolt in 1868, the town of Lares was independent for 24 hours in the now commemorative holiday El Grito de Lares (Cry of Lares). The town of Jayuya had a similar uprising in the 1950. Apart from these events, Puerto Rico has remained under the continuous dominion of either Spain or The United States. Although we gained the right to vote for our governor, our decisions have always been subject to approval by the U.S. government.

Our history is essential to an analysis of the current status of the island. To understand our present situation, it is necessary to reflect on how we got here. It must be noted that either Spain or the U.S. have consistently interfered in the development of Puerto Rican history. This meddling in Puerto Rican affairs illustrates the archipelago’s lack of sovereignty. Armando Silva identifies the propiedad narrativa (narrative property) as a distinctive characteristic of countries in the so-called “First World.” The propiedad narrativa is the ability to tell stories from a perspective of your own, to live in the center of a world that revolves around you. On the other hand, countries who do not belong in the “First World” tell their stories: “from the wound perpetrated by the conquistador, from the imperialism that burdens it, from the other that does not recognize him; let’s say they are not the center of the universe but an accident that gravitates” (Silva, 1992 p. 66). Puerto Rico may not be a Third World country but it is an accident that gravitates, restricted from the development of a history of and on our own.

**PROMESA**

The current Puerto Rican situation requires a revision of our exclusion from the United Nations list of Non-Self Governing Territories. In the summer of 2016, the Puerto Rican government failed to pay $2 million dollars, the first installment of the 70-billion-dollar bond debt. This brought to surface the profound government deficit and the severity of the economic crisis. As a result, on July the 1st, the United States Senate, the House of Representatives, and President Barak Obama approved Bill H.R. 5278--better known as PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability
Act). The bill was created to address Puerto Rico’s economic crisis by establishing a Financial Oversight and Management Board. This board came to be known pejoratively in Puerto Rico as La Junta from its complete name La Junta de Control Fiscal. The members of La Junta were selected by the president of the United States and the power of this board surpasses that of all elected candidates in Puerto Rico’s government. Moreover, the members of La Junta do not have to live on the island. It has been questioned whether this governing body really represents the best interests of Puerto Ricans. It is clear that the imposition of PROMESA is an anti-democratic measure that revokes the rights awarded to Puerto Ricans in 1953. Ironically, the initials of Bill H.R. 5278, PROMESA, read the word “promise” in Spanish.

While Puerto Ricans were not consulted, they did not remain silent. Local leaders expressed discontent and condemned the imposition of PROMESA. Carmen Yulín, mayor of the city of San Juan explained that PROMESA unveils the colonial status of the archipelago and offers a “broken promise to the people of Puerto Rico”. Yulín believes the bill leaves Puerto Ricans voiceless and gives total power to a “colonial control board” (Yulín on interview with Democracy Now, 2016). Local senator Maria de Lourdes acknowledged that Bill H.R. 5278 recognizes the failure of the colonial experiment otherwise known as Estado Libre Asociado (Agencia EFE, June 2016). In an interview with Wapa-TV, De Lourdes described PROMESA as a symptom of the bigger problem, colonialism. (De Lourdes on interview with Wapa-TV, June 2016). Although PROMESA was approved by a majority in the U.S. Senate, senators in the U.S. have been vocal about their opposition. Senator Luis Gutiérrez indicated that there was no difference between La Junta established by PROMESA and the Chilean junta established by Pinochet on 1973 (Gutiérrez on interview with Democracy Now, 2016). Senator Bob Menendez described it as putting “a Band-Aid on a bullet hole” (White, 2016). Fundamentally, all critiques highlight that the establishment of a governing body does not address the underlying economic deficiencies. The imposition of PROMESA reveals the colonial nature of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Numerous civil efforts have demonstrated dissatisfaction to Bill H.R. 5278; manifestations, strikes, and the establishment of Campamento contra La Junta (Camp against the board), a camp occupying an area in the US District Court of Puerto Rico (Jackson, 2016; Guillama Capella, 2016). Out of all the responses in opposition to PROMESA, my research focuses on a wall in the city of San Juan. I argue that the
artwork materialized the concept of the public sphere, a space that provoked political discussion and debate. The murals Grabadores por Grabadores celebrated our identity while its transformation to “La Puerta” exists as a direct response to the imposition of Bill H.R. 5278.
Chapter 3. From Grabadores por Grabadores to La Puerta

Production of an image: Grabadores por Grabadores

The trajectory of the mural Grabadores por Grabadores (Figure 1) begins with its inception in January 2016. During the 4th Trienal Poligráfica de San Juan, Latinoamerica y el Caribe (Poly/Graphic Triennial of San Juan, Latin America and the Caribbean) students of the Universidad de Artes Plásticas (University of Plastic Arts) in San Juan created the mural Grabadores por Grabadores (Printmakers for Printmakers). The student-artists worked under the name Colectivo Grabadores por Grabadores (Collective Printmakers for Printmakers) following the guidance of Rosenda Alvarez Faro (Muñiz Ortiz, 2015). The mural was created on the north side of the Street of San José, in the city of San Juan. Its location marks an important factor for the exposure and access to the mural. The Puerto Rican capital city holds a port for cruises and is a landmark for visits from tourists and locals. The title of the mural corresponds to a tradition with much significance in Puerto Rican art history.

Figure 1. Mural Grabadores por Grabadores, by Colectivo Grabadores por Grabadores, 2015, retrieved from www.cimam.org

Printmaking and engraving were introduced to the island around the 1950s and became the most prevalent artistic forms of the epoch. The easy distribution and low creation cost made it idyllic for its use in communicating with Puerto Rican people. The government established the Division of Community Education of Puerto Rico (DIVEDCO) in 1949 where they funded workshops and produced materials such as films, pamphlets, and posters; with the goal of educating the public. Printmakers were employed for the production of posters that addressed social, educational and cultural
issues, for example hygiene, almentation, disease control and participation in the electoral process (Hermandad de artistas gráficos de Puerto Rico, 2004). In the book *Puerto Rico: Art and Identity*, the authors identify printmaking as “functional and public art” (Hermandad de artistas gráficos de Puerto Rico, 2004, p. 326). Puerto Rican printmakers developed the art form collectively, they established studios and worked collaboratively. Printmaking, as a result, became a populist tradition where artists were given the opportunity to produce art for fellow Puerto Ricans about issues of importance to local audiences. More importantly, it was influential in the elaboration and development of a Puerto Rican identity. It should be noted that printmakers also used their art to depict their disagreement with Puerto Rico’s colonial status and advocate for independence. An example of this is the plethora of posters that celebrate nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, and other important figures of the independence movement such as Julia de Burgos, Ramón Emeterio Betances and Eugenio Maria de Hostos (Hermandad de artistas gráficos de Puerto Rico, 2004). Therefore, printmaking helped the promotion of art in the island and the legacy of Puerto Rican printmakers is recognized and celebrated internationally. Printmaking has been recognized as a form of cultural resistance, that promoted autochthonous values (Hermandad de artistas gráficos de Puerto Rico, 2004).

A local initiative that celebrates the work of salient Puerto Rican printmakers is the creation of the mural *Grabadores por Grabadores*. In the mural, printmakers were immortalized through their portrayal in wheat paste posters found alongside the wall. The initial eight artists were (from left to right): Jose Rosa, Rafael Tufiño, Carlos Marichal, Haydee Landing, Lorenzo Homar, Luis Abraham Ortiz, Carlos Raquel Rivera and Myrna Baez (Figure 1). Although the printmakers were emphatic in the mural, a different section of the oeuvre gained popularity. The Puerto Rican flag painted on a door and located at the center, became the heart of the mural *Grabadores por Grabadores*.

The Puerto Rican flag has 4 elements: 3 red stripes, 2 white stripes, a blue triangle and a star in the middle of the triangle. The selection of the light blue for the triangle in the flag is extremely significant. The shade of blue in the Puerto Rican flag is a topic of debate. The light blue alludes to the first flag created by members of the independence movement in 1892. This flag is normally used with the undertone of independence and nationalist values. In 1948, under the appointed governor Jesus T.
Piñero and with the approval of local leaders in the legislature, the government established Law 53. Known as Ley de mordaza (Gag law), this regulation criminalized the displaying of the Puerto Rican flag with the objective of subduing the independence movement. The law also criminalized the exhibition of any material that spoke in favor of independence and the organization and assembly of any group with similar objectives. For nine years, it was illegal to lift a Puerto Rican flag in Puerto Rico. The law was repealed in 1957 and deemed unconstitutional. Later on, Luis Muñoz Marin adopted the dark blue for the triangle of the Puerto Rican flag to resemble the dark blue in the flag of the United States. Today, the flag that hoists in governmental institutions and official events is dark blue. However, the light blue flag is still used as an act of defiance.

The initial version of the mural Grabadores por Grabadores was an undeniable success. It was common to walk down the San José Street and see people taking pictures with the mural. I argue that this version of the mural existed as a site of identity. A location to celebrate Puerto Ricanness. Whether you agreed or disagreed with the tone used in the triangle, seeing the flag painted on the door was a majestic experience. When visiting this first version of the mural every Boricua would want to reiterate: Yo soy Boricua pa’ que tu lo sepas (I am Boricua, just so you know). The mural served as a site of identity, a space to celebrate our national symbol and to be proud of Puerto Rican identity.

Production of an image: La Puerta

On the night of July 4th, while the United States celebrated their independence and days after the implementation of PROMESA. The mural Grabadores por Grabadores changed drastically. The second version of the mural portrayed newer versions of the original wheat paste posters and additional posters portraying other grabadores. However, the most drastic change was done to the patriotic symbol portrayed on the door. The new version of the Puerto Rican flag was displayed in black and white (Figure 2).
Three days later, a letter was distributed to the media titled: “Carta abierta: Un llamado a la solidaridad” (Open Letter: A Call to Solidarity). In the letter, an artist collective named Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia (Artists in Solidarity and Resistance) claimed responsibility for the mural’s repainting. The anonymous group stated:

This act is the evidence that there is an artistic community that is not willing to give up, that will stand up and fight against the impositions of an absolutist government and its policies of austerity; their most recent example: the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22, p.1)

Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia identify the act as a call to reflect, an invitation to discuss the social, economic and political crisis the country is undergoing. Ultimately, they wanted to generate a message of resistance with the new reading of the flag and invite “the Puerto Rican people, our Caribbean and Latin American friends, our American comrades and other countries...” (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22, p. 1) to take action, to unite, stand, and fight. Later, on the 22nd of July, the open letter was made part of the mural (in both Spanish and English) as a wheat paste poster (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22). Journalist and scholar Julieta Victoria Muñoz Alvarado interviewed the artistic group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia. In the article “Monoestrellada blanca y negra: “No es luto es resistencia”’, Muñoz Alvarado queries about the artistic techniques, their objectives, and future plans. The artists specified that their aim is to start a change that encompasses all aspects of the self. The group is emphatic about the idea of change as an intrinsic act that permeates the way we treat
each other and later on becomes part of everyday life (Muñoz, 2016). This reflects a desire to impart change from within. This method is requisite; the Puerto Rican citizenship must experience an ideological shift that precipitates an awareness of the exploitative nature of the colonial status.

The mural is now referred to as La Puerta (The Door) or La Puerta Bandera (The Flag Door). The event was catalytic in motivating other artists to develop the topic of resistance through their work. A new wave of street art has taken over walls in different Puerto Rican towns. However, a considerable amount of the new murals are situated in the capital city of San Juan. A Facebook page called La Puerta (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016) has been established to communicate with the citizenship. This page serves as a tool to track the discussion, via murals, graffiti, paintings and other pieces of urban art appearing across the islands. It is also used by both the collective and the citizenship to post pictures and other media related to the message of resistance.

The mural in the street of San José is not the only mural created by the collective. The group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia has a second wall in the Ramón Baldorioty de Castro Avenue in Santurce. This wall has been described by other scholars as one of strategic location: “thanks to the important flux of vehicles and the traffic jams that forces the drivers to contemplate the ephemeral walls or marks of passerby” (Romero, 2008, p. 4). This key location serves to portray the zealous activity of the collective. The “Baldorioty de Castro” mural has been repainted six times with different messages (Figure 3). Table 1 gives details about the changes and translations for the six different messages painted in the Baldorioty de Castro mural, as posted in the Facebook Community Page La Puerta (Table 1).
Figure 3. Photographs compiled in such a way as to represent the versions of the Baldorioty De Castro Mural. Adapted from La Puerta by Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016.

Table 1. Messages of the mural in the Baldorioty de Castro Avenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JULY 11, 2016</td>
<td>La Resistencia no tiene miedo ¡Únete!</td>
<td>The resistance has no fear, join us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 12, 2016</td>
<td>Ni rojo, ni azul ni junta ¡Puñeta!</td>
<td>Neither red, blue nor board, Dammit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECEMBER 1ST, 2016</td>
<td>Las únicas cenizas que queremos son de la junta</td>
<td>The only ashes we want are those of the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 4TH, 2017</td>
<td>Si los medios mienten las paredes son nuestras</td>
<td>If the media lies, the walls are ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE 5, 2017</td>
<td>¿Puerto Rico: cuándo entenderás que nos usan?</td>
<td>Puerto Rico: When will you understand that they are using us?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first version of the Baldorioty de Castro mural shows an invitation to the passerby to join the movement. The mural reference the two main political parties in Puerto Rico, who use red (Partido Popular Democratico) and blue (Partido Nuevo Progresista) as their respective colors. It calls for a change in the bi-partisanship control that has dominated the political environment and a rejection to La Junta. The third message is in support of an environmental cause that seeks to cease the burning of coal and the subsequent ash deposits in the town of Guayama. It implies that the only ashes needed in Puerto Rico are those of La Junta. The fourth mural is an invitation to join the national strike that took place on May 1st of 2017. It must be noted that this strike was organized by worker syndicates, student movements, and other organizations to oppose the measures taken by La Junta to address the crisis (Figueroa Cancel, 2017). The fifth version of the mural is a critique of the local media coverage on political and social issues. The group retorted that if the media continue to lie, the walls would be the new method of communication. The last version of the Baldorioty de Castro mural is a call to evaluate the way the US has treated Puerto Rico. It tells the passerby to ponder on how Puerto Ricans have been and are being used by the US government. This message makes reference to the birth control experiments done in Puerto Rico during the 1950’s and the recent use of the pesticide Naled to combat the Zika epidemic on the island. In the Baldorioty murals and other walls painted by the same artistic collective or supporters, the black Puerto Rican flag is added in the lower right corner. These acts demonstrate how active the group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia is and their collaboration with other social struggles, as seen by their third and fourth repainting of the Baldorioty mural.

Out of the eleven subsequent murals posted on the Facebook page La Puerta, two have been painted in locations outside the archipelago. The all-female artistic collective Morivivi created a replica of La Puerta in New York (Figure 4). An anonymous artist in Florida created a mural that reads “Decolonize Puerto Rico” on a wall at the Ringling College of Art and Design (Figure 5). It must be noted that from 2006 until 2015, Florida, Pennsylvania, and New York were the top three states for Puerto Rican migration flow (Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, 2017).
Figure 4. La Puerta in East Harlem, New York. From Viajamos a Nueva York … by Colectivo Moriviví, 2016, Instagram.

Figure 5. Mural Decolonize Puerto Rico, Sarasota, Florida. no name by Liliana Ortega, 2016,

**La Puerta as a site of interaction**

An important element about La Puerta is the interactive response it has provoked. In communications with a representative from the collective, they shared a log of the instances in which the mural has been tampered or modified. On July 6th of 2016, the mural was vandalized with a blue dot in the triangle of the flag. Additionally, candles, flowers and a framed picture of the old version of the mural were placed in the stoop in front of the door. On that same night, the collective restored the mural. Two days after, the mural was vandalized a second time with a splatter of red paint (Figure 6). On the same day, a video was published on YouTube by Ellis Omar. The visuals portray a
passerby walking around San Juan until making it to the San José Street where the mural is located. It is accompanied by a song that talks about the changes in the flag and the relationship to the current Puerto Rican economic and social situation (Omar 2016).

Figure 6. From Vandalizan La Puerta con pintura Roja by Hermes Ayala, 2016. Courtesy of Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia

All of these examples constitute direct citizen responses to the mural and to the message it aims to deliver. On July 19th, the artists re-painted the flag in black and white as it remains until today. As mentioned before, on July 22nd the collective added wheat paste posters of their open letter to the mural in both English and Spanish. (Figure 7). Lastly on October 30, Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia collaborated with the hip-hop group Post Rap and added new wheat posters that read “Decolonize yourself” in the city of San Juan and other locations of the Metropolitan Area (Figure 8).

In conclusion, it is essential to analyze La Puerta as a discursive piece of art—a mural that created a discussion. It must be noted that not all the interactions with the mural present an agreement with the message. Both instances in which the mural was vandalized illustrate a conflictive reception to the new colors of the mural. Nonetheless, the act of redressing the flag generated conversations about the future of Puerto Rico.
Figure 7. Open Letter posted in the mural La Puerta. Se pasquina la Carta abierta: Un llamado a la solidaridad en la pared de La Puerta by Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016. Courtesy of the artists.

Figure 8. Decolonize yourself wheat paste posters. Pasquinada Descolonizate en colaboración con Postrap by Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia & Postrap, 2016. Courtesy of the artists.
La Puerta as a Symbol

The flag in black and white has transcended the mural on the street of San José. It tells a story as a standalone icon and it has become a symbol of resistance, a beacon. It has been adopted by the movement Se acabaron las promesas (Promises are over) and used in t-shirts, posters, and shields in protests against La Junta (Dávila, 2016) (Figure 9). In addition, this version of the flag has been used in signs during pickets by the student movement of the University of Puerto Rico. It was also used to cover the main gates of the Rio Piedras Campus of the same institution when the students closed the university during a strike (Figure 10). Outside of Puerto Rico, the black and white flag appeared in protests during La Junta’s meeting on Wall Street, New York City. Protesters glued stickers to the iconic bull in the Financial District and left a t-shirt with the flag hanging from one of the bull’s horns (Figure 11) (Carrión, 2016).

![Figure 9. La Puerta as a symbol I. From Promises Are Over Squad by Juan C. Dávila, 2016. Reprinted with permission.](image-url)
The black and white flag exists as a symbol of resistance against PROMESA and La Junta, both inside and outside the archipelago. The murals in New York (Figure 4) and Florida (Figure 5) are a testament to how artistic communities in the diaspora use their work to communicate resistance and bring attention to the problems in their homeland. This black and white version of the Puerto Rican flag has turned into an icon,
an emblem not only of the collective Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia but of opposition and struggles that seek to fight against austerity measures and colonialism.
Chapter 4. From Site of Identity to Site of Resistance

I firmly believe that the initial version of the mural Grabadores por Grabadores existed as a site of identity. A space where our national symbol reminded the spectators that being Puerto Rican is something to be proud of. Moreover, it celebrated an artistic tradition with deep ties in the archipelago. Identity is a complex concept merging ascription and avowal; more so for Puerto Ricans. We are both United States citizens and Puerto Ricans from birth. Given that Puerto Rico is not a sovereign nation, our nationality is not reflected on a passport, our flag is the expression of our territory. It could also be argued that the initial mural was a site of resistance due to the color selection of the triangle. I do not ascribe to this interpretation because I believe a Puerto Ricans identified with the mural Grabadores por Grabadores, whether they believe in an independent Puerto Rico or not.

La Puerta brought a new reading to the mural in the San José Street. Although it can remain as a site of identity, the artists intended to invoke a message of resistance. The use of the black and white Puerto Rican flag in other social movements advocates for the success of this message. However, whether resistance was achieved or not is for the spectator of the mural to decide. Nevertheless, the transformation of the place had a notable impact on the citizenship. I argue that the transformation to La Puerta developed the place and it no longer represents a site of identity, but a site of resistance.

Hypothesis

I postulate that the mural Grabadores por Grabadores existed as a site of identity that was transformed into a site of resistance with the establishment of La Puerta. By changing the colors of the flag, the artists created a disruption of the space and place. The symbolism used engaged the spectators and invited them to reflect on the current crisis. I believe a majority of the Puerto Rican population was involuntarily guided to consider the causes, to reflect on the question: Why is the flag in black and white? This evaluation on the current social situation evidences the importance and effectiveness of the mural La Puerta. Each Puerto Rican could have their own exploration and discussion of what is wrong with Puerto Rico and how to make it better. Before the open letter was
glued to the mural, the artists did not use the piece to overtly tell onlookers and passers-by what was wrong. The artwork itself evoked and provoked an analysis.

Some pressing questions that arise from this work: How does the mural present concrete opposition to PROMESA? How does it present opposition to colonialism? How does a mural of a black and white flag represent resistance? My answer quotes James C. Scott, “Resistance, like domination, fights a war on two fronts” (Scott, 1990, p. 188). In his book, Scott discusses everyday forms of resistance. Hidden transcripts are underground or behind the scenes acts of resistance that might not be perceived nor understood by dominant forces, but remain essential to the cause. They are meaningful and advantageous for resistance movements. These hidden transcripts are representations of real ideas carried by the members of subordinate groups. Hidden transcripts can be discussed using Silva’s work on urban imaginaries (Silva, 1992). Urban imaginaries are “collective metaphors” cooperative representations where citizens promote alternative points of views or different ways of living. With the second version of the mural, the collective Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia shared their vision of Puerto Rico. When discussing street art, Armstrong explains: “Street art can function as node of meditation, a focal point for reflection on the condition of urban existence” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 5). This definition fits the discussion of La Puerta, as if Armstrong was writing about the mural in the street of San José. An art work that not only guided the citizens to reflect about the current crisis but also displayed the urban imaginary of an artistic group that believes in an independent Puerto Rico.

The mural La Puerta represents a subtle, low profile form of resistance with a profound ideological impact. The multifaceted war against dominion must start with a change in mentality, a spark of hope that makes the public realize that a more just nation is possible. The transformation of the mural might not be the single catalyst event but it instigates and induces a contemplation on the state of our country. La Puerta exists as a hidden transcript, an urban imaginary within the walls of the capital city. It invites every spectator to arrive at their own conclusion. The symbolism on the mural facilitates the possibility of different readings. This is one of the most powerful features of the mural. It could be argued that the citizens who brought flowers and candles to La Puerta saw it as a site of mourning. Others could have perceived the darkness in the flag in relation to the grabadores. I will argue that the use of the flag as a symbol makes it relevant for all Puerto Ricans; living in the archipelago or in the diaspora. The resistance proposed by
Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia reflects a direct opposition to La Junta imposed with PROMESA. Indirectly, it represents an opposition to the colonial status of the island and a challenge to the general meaning of Puerto Ricaness. It is an invitation to explore the present state of the country and reflect on the possibility of a better Puerto Rico.

As Anna Indych-López states, murals are “an instrument of social and cultural transformation” (Indych-López, 2009, p. 1). Rolson, in his study of Chilean murals, defined them as: “not simply ‘folk art,’ but an essential element of the mobilization and politicization of the community.” (Rolson, 2005, p. 114). Armstrong believed that “street art is revolting and revolutionary; it is layered descent and the colours of resistance.” (Armstrong, 2006, p.7). In complete agreement with these definitions, La Puerta fostered a new gaze, a reflection on the state of the country. It was used to mobilize the community, to protest and stand up. It was a physical transformation, that seeks to impart an ideological transformation on the citizen. Hopefully, it represents the beginning of a long trajectory for the archipelago of Puerto Rico.
Methodology

My strategy to studying and discussing the mural Grabadores por Grabadores and its transformation to La Puerta comprised two methods of data collection and two approaches. I employed discourse analysis to examine articles that discussed the transformation of the mural Grabadores por Grabadores to La Puerta and to track the activity in the Facebook Group La Puerta. The findings of this process are presented on Chapter 3. Secondly, I employed a survey to gather the opinions of other Puerto Ricans regarding the changes in the mural. The work of Kristin Moss and Armando Silva was pivotal for the discussion of my findings and presentation of my topic.

Scholar Kristin Lee Moss (2000) employed a triadic approach when discussing murals as sites of identity negotiation in Philadelphia. Moss’ framework encompassed: “the production of an image, the image itself, and audience reception.” (Moss, 2000, p. 377). The production of the image is a process of the creator, it looks at the intentions and purposes the artists embedded in the work. The image itself is a detailed description of the artifact of study. The audience reception focuses on the public’s ideas, reactions, and interactions with the site. Moss’ approach has served to structure my study of the topic at hand. It aided me in organizing which issues to focus on when studying a mural. As with Moss, Armando Silva uses a triadic approach when exploring the ways in which citizens read and comprehend images in the city. Silva presents the process of exhibición (exhibition), encuadre (framing), and mirada ciudadana (citizen’s gaze) (Silva, 1992). I will employ these concepts in my discussion of the audience reception to the mural Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta. The concepts of exhibición, encuadre and mirada ciudadana are anchored on the experience of the citizen; they present coherently how the visual registry translates into a subjective reading of the artwork.

The concepts of exhibición, encuadre and mirada ciudadana developed by Armando Silva in Imaginarios Urbanos (1992) help us understand how a citizen reads a city. Silva defines the process of exhibition as the perception of an image. It is a sensorial process that responds to a registry. It must be noted that this operation is not limited to visual input. It can respond to a visual registry like a graffiti or a sign; or an auditory registry like the case of a legend, joke, or gossip. In the operation of exhibición the subject identifies a registry, however, both remain autonomous and detached. For
this undertaking, I will discuss the murals conjointly since it does not entail a reading, but a recognition of the work.

The operation of encuadre is an alignment between the object and the subject. Silva states: "In the reading of a text or in the observation of a figure; a similar operation takes place and the subject tries to coincide what she knows with what she now knows through the new message" (Silva, 1992, p. 25). Through encuadre, the subject does more than observe. She juxtaposes the message gathered from the oeuvre to her paradigm. The citizen uses her previous knowledge to frame the work and identify how it relates to her. The citizen creates a relation with the object implying they are no longer separate and independent. Silva identifies two types of encuadre: explícito (explicit) and implícito (implicit). In encuadres explícitos (explicit framing) the author uses the example of a wall on any Latin-American city that reads: "Fuera yanquis imperialistas" (Out imperialist Yanquees); the message is clear and direct. The encuadres implícitos (implicit framing) are complex, symbolic, and require an interpretation but the effects are more profound and have greater consequences on the citizen (Silva, 1992, p. 25). Both mural Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta exemplify instances of encuadres implícitos and the survey results unveils readings to these works. I will discuss the encuadre of each mural separately and present common themes, sentiments, and concepts presented in the survey responses.

Finally, the operation of mirada ciudadana (citizen’s gaze) unveils different ways of seeing. The mirada ciudadana offers a new paradigm in which to look at its surrounding, a different way of behaving in the city. In the process of addressing the foreign and mediating it with the familiar, the citizen can encounter different points of departures, points of view with possible divergent fundaments. If the encuadre is an operation of the citizen and the oeuvre, the mirada ciudadana steps into the macro and looks for the relationship between the work and the citizenship as a whole. It situates the artist and the message they want to convey in an ideological setting. After the citizen encounters the object of exhibition and tries to make sense by framing it into what is known, she unveils a different gaze, a paradigm behind the object of exhibition. This resonates with Armstrong’s discussion on the possibility of street art. Citing Buck-Morss, he says: “Perhaps it is street art that can offer us this new dialectic of seeing” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 6). For the operation of mirada ciudadana, I will analyze the open
letter published by Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia (Appendix A) to discern the artists’ objectives and the ideas and ideology behind the artwork.

Silva’s understating of how citizens interpret their surroundings in a city pertains to the topic at hand for the following reasons. First, it takes into consideration the citizens’ positionality. Systematic analyzes tend to stray away and do not value the subjectivity of the citizen. A critical element in the operation of encuadre is acknowledging that each individual will bring into an analysis its personal experience and trajectory. Secondly, it recognizes the value in the object of analysis as more than the observable. A graffiti is not just a scribble on the wall but a communicative element with political, ideological, and social messages. These registries recognized by the citizen uncover a philosophy—an ideology of which the registry is just an expression.

The production of the image(s) has been discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. The images of each mural can be seen in Figure 1 for Grabadores por Grabadores and Figure 2 for La Puerta. The audience reception will be analyzed through the responses to an online survey. The survey was employed to gather the perspectives of other Puerto Ricans about the trajectory and effects of these murals. The survey was created in both Spanish and English, given that both are considered official languages in Puerto Rico. After careful consideration, I decided to seek participants who consider themselves Puerto Rican whether they reside in or outside Puerto Rico. Given the massive exodus of Puerto Ricans to the United States and other countries (Cortés Chico, 2016), my survey seeks to gather the opinions of Puerto Ricans both in the diaspora and the archipelago. The instrument used to collect data was proposed to and approved by the Simon Fraser Office of Research Ethics. The survey was promoted through social media in the Facebook Page of La Puerta and in the academic and social networks of the author.

The online survey was comprised of 27 questions and divided in six sections. The first section contained four demographics questions and two questions each inquired if the respondent adhered to Puerto Rican and US identity. The second and third section addressed each version of mural. The Grabadores por Grabadores section had three open-ended, two close-ended questions and one Likert scale. The La Puerta section contains a repetition of the second section and three open-ended questions. The fourth section of the survey asked two open-ended questions, while the fifth section
posed two open-ended questions regarding reactions to the transformation of the mural. The last section of the survey asks if participants have any message to share with the artists in two open-ended questions.

By studying the intentions of the artists in conjunction with the reception of the public, I intended to present a holistic landscape of the murals Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta. I analyze the effects of the mural on Puerto Rican citizenship and compare those discussions with the intentions of the artists. However, my main idea is to inquire if participants associated the two versions of the mural with identity, resistance, neither, or both.
Chapter 5. Analysis and Findings

A total of 125 participants answered the online survey, 52 in Spanish and 73 in English. Since the project focuses on the perceptions of Puerto Ricans and one of the respondents did not identify himself as Puerto Rican; only 124 responses were analyzed. Out of the 124 participants, 77 currently reside in the archipelago, while 37 reside in the United States. Other places of residence listed were Germany, South Korea, St. Kitts and Nevis, Japan, The Netherlands and Canada. Eighty-five of the participants identified themselves as females, 36 as male and three preferred not to disclose this information.

Out of the 124 Puerto Ricans who answered the survey, 60 identified themselves as citizens of the US while 64 answered no to this question. This sheds light on the complexity of Puerto Rican identity, having both citizenships do not imply that all Puerto Ricans identify as US citizens. On the other hand, having two official languages does not mean that speakers adhere to only one. Although participants were asked to select one language, the responses displayed considerable instances of code-switching. For the purposes of coding and analysis, responses were divided between English and Spanish.

Exhibición: Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta

The process of exhibición for both the mural Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta is not limited to physical visits to the space, it includes access to pictures, videos, or stories about the murals. In the survey, participants were presented with a picture of each of the murals and responded whether they: visited the space, accessed any type of media where the mural appeared, or had never seen/heard of the mural. Figure 12 presents the responses to this question in relation to both murals. It can be noted that more participants visited Grabadores por Grabadores than La Puerta. This is not determinant of preference nor popularity; it can be a result of access to the location after the transformation. I was surprised by the amount of respondent who have not encountered the second version of the mural. As mentioned before, local and international news outlets covered the story of the repainting. An element that was not taken into consideration was accommodating the study for participants with visual impairments. A respondent explained how he did not recognize differences between the
murals due to colorblindness. Future studies should address these issues to ensure the production of inclusive research.

**Figure 12. Survey Responses in relation to the mural Grabadores por Grabadores**

For this section of the survey, participants expressed their reactions (if any) to the mural Grabadores por Grabadores. Participants used a Likert scale to respond how happy or sad this mural made them, the results are illustrated in Figure 13. The questions in this section addressed the emotions evoked by the piece, the ideas or concepts that came to mind when seeing the mural, and if participants related the mural to Puerto Rican identity with the option to develop their response. The result of the Likert scale evidence that this site was perceived positively by 65% of the participants.

**The effects of Grabadores por Grabadores**

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Encuadre

The responses in this section linked the murals Grabadores por Grabadores to a space that deals with Puerto Rican identity. The emotional response to the mural included the words pride, love, and nostalgia in responses for both languages. Although some respondents felt impartial about the space, a majority responded it evoked pride and patriotic feelings. Table 2 presents the five most used words from responses to this question. Another common sentiment in responses was curiosity regarding the grabadores. Some participants questioned who were the figures portrayed in the mural and those who were aware mentioned feeling thankful and proud of the work and legacy of the grabadores. I was interested by the recurrence of the word nostalgia and 64% of the participants who used this concept currently reside outside of Puerto Rico. Whether is longing for a time in the past or a place you used to be in, the mural evoked feelings related to Puerto Rico. Other words mentioned were home, heritage, patriotism, and homeland. Responses also addressed the color of the flag, for example: “Nostalgia and pride that the color of the flag is the correct sky blue and not the USA blue.” Another participant mentioned: “Related to divisive nationality issues. I am totally neutral” addressing the debate that accompanies the colour blue in the Puerto Rican flag.

Table 2. Most used words in emotions evoked by Grabadores por Grabadores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pride, proud</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nostalgia</td>
<td>patrio, patria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none, neutral</td>
<td>ninguna, nada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admiration</td>
<td>amor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>nostalgia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second set of questions asked for concepts or ideas that came to mind when looking at the mural Grabadores por Grabadores. The responses for this question reflect a connection between the patriotic symbol and unity. Not only was the flag discussed as a representation of identity but participants spoke about togetherness and culture within their discussion of the national symbol. Another common topic was the significance of the location of the mural. Two examples of this phenomena are: “I think about how touristy this mural is. I worked at Old San Juan and every tourist was looking for it.” and “In many ways it always seemed an emblematic image of Old San Juan.” Responses for this question also addressed the grabadores with curiosity, for example: “It represents
our culture and I should know more about the people portrayed and the artist." Another response explained “I must read more Puerto Rican stories to the children in my family or friends.” The mural not only aroused pride but also a desire to know more about Puerto Rican culture. The most commonly used words for this question are portrayed in Figure 14. The word cloud of responses in Spanish shows a sizable concept más (more). In the use of this term, respondents expressed a need for more murals like this one. This was echoed in the English responses and can be seen by the size of the word mural in the word cloud.

**Figure 14. Concepts and Ideas evoked by Grabadores por Grabadores**

The final question asked if the mural Grabadores por Grabadores represented Puerto Rican identity and participants had the option of explaining their response. One hundred and five of the participants agreed with this statement while nineteen disagreed. Participants who disagree explained: “There is so much more to Puerto Rican culture,” as well as “it’s just a flag,” and “it does not show what we really are as a country.” Another stated that “these people do not point to anything that I recognize in my own experience as a Puerto Rican.” On the other hand, participants who agreed said: “It has our people and our flag,” and “Our flag is one of the things they’ve tried to take away from our identity but have failed to do so,” and also that “it shows our history, struggle and the foundation of the Puerto Rican people” and that “it speaks of people who have forged Puerto Rican identity, people who have molded it.” In this last question, participants addressed the colour of the flag extensively. Whether to mention it was in
the “right” colours or to say that it didn’t represent our identity because it lacked the company of the flag of the United States. A second recurrent topic was tradition. Participants discussed the grabadores in the mural and explained that the wheat paste posters displayed traditional clothing and reminded them of an older generation, folklore, roots, and tradition. Thirdly, responses addressed the idea of national heroes, nationalistic leaders, the hard work of the grabadores, and their international recognition. Other spoke the role of the “jibaro puertorriqueño” (a description of the Puerto Rican who lived in the country side) in Puerto Rican identity.

**Mirada ciudadana**

The collective Grabadores por Grabadores and Rosenda Alvarez created the mural “with the intention to promote our national identity” (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22). This mural also recognizes important figures in printmaking, which makes this part of the *mirada ciudadana* of the work. The production of Grabadores por Grabadores celebrates printmaking as a relevant artistic tradition. The artists, being grabadores themselves used the mural to convey that this tradition is not only valuable for Puerto Rican identity but should not be forgotten. Additionally, the Puerto Rican flag in light blue acknowledges that printmakers were activist and vehement believers of Puerto Rican independence. On a final note, the flag is painted over a door. The symbolism remained foreign until a survey respondent mentioned: “light blue flag, Puerto Ricaness, symbol of a door that is yet to be open.” Whether this was intentional is yet to be confirmed by the artists. Nonetheless, the mural addressed Puerto Rican Independence in the selection of blue for the triangle of the flag and it is clear that the *mirada ciudadana* of the artists believes this path as a viable option, an unopened door.

**The effects of La Puerta**

The La Puerta was presented alongside three additional questions. After inquiring about the emotions, concepts, and whether identity was evoked by the mural, participants were asked to identify changes in the second version, whether this new version helped them reflect about the current political situation, and if La Puerta represents resistance to the US with the option to explain their answer. Figure 15 depicts
the answers to how happy or sad participants felt after seeing the La Puerta version of the mural. Fifty-three percent of participants felt negatively about La Puerta and this demonstrates a drastic change from perceptions towards Grabadores por Grabadores. It should be noted that responses for neutral feelings remained the same for both versions of the murals. In conclusion, the changes in the mural precipitated a shift from positive to negative in reception towards the mural on San José Street.

![Graph showing Likert Scale responses to La Puerta](image)

**Figure 15. Likert Scale responses to La Puerta**

**Encuadre**

The responses in this section reflect that the mural La Puerta exists as a site of mourning. Forty-three percent of respondents expressed sentiments of sorrow. Table 3 portrays this, with the word sadness (tristeza) in the top position of responses in both languages. Participants perceived the mural La Puerta primarily as a site of mourning, although it can also be studied as a site of ambivalence. Interactions with the space support the perceptions of a site of mourning; people visited the mural to leave candles and flowers portraying a similar reading of the art work (Figure 6). A response that exemplifies this sentiment explains: “The flag in black makes us feel we are failing our homeland.”

Another common topic was the perceiving La Puerta as a reflection on the reality or present state of the archipelago. Some responses expressed: “The door shows how our island has deteriorated not only politically, socially, and culturally” or a “sense of reality” and the “severity of the reality we live in.” These responses grounded the artwork with the current situation and saw the mural as an expression of Puerto Rico today.
Table 3. Most used words in emotions evoked by La Puerta

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sadness</td>
<td>tristeza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>realidad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pride</td>
<td>bandera</td>
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<tr>
<td>anger</td>
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<td>frustration</td>
<td>orgullo</td>
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However, other responses portray contrary receptions to the mural that support its perception as a site of ambivalence. Some participants expressed that the mural evoked feelings of pride, empowerment, and honour. In these responses, participants perceived La Puerta as a call to arms, a way to bring the citizenship together to address the current political and social issues. Others felt proud of the artists and the artistic act. These responses expressed they saw value in the artwork even if it wasn’t their ideal portrayal of the flag. One respondent explained, “even though the flag is in mourning, I can still feel proud of the work behind it.” Another explained it represents “hope and satisfaction for the political expression of art.” It must be noted that certain participants remained neutral or expressed that this mural did not make them feel anything different from the first version. A response addressed the new what paste posters and the portrayal of more female figures in a positive light. Another response addressed the role of the United States as benefactor, it reads: “It is sad that people painted the door black to mourn PR, when US is trying to make things better.”

The most common concepts and ideas evoked by the mural La Puerta are presented in the Figure 16. A common sentiment in the responses is negativity toward the dark colors in the flag. These responses also addressed the current political situation extensively. A majority of the respondents spoke about the current crisis. An exemplifying response said the mural represented: “a reflection of our times.”
On this question, participants discussed abundantly the role of the government in the crisis, particularly corruption. Some answers that exemplify this: “our island is dying due to a corrupt government” and “all the parties that have been in power have stolen from the people of Puerto Rico,” as well as “the economic situation in Puerto Rico is the result of robbery.” Some answers, both positive and negative, reflected a future orientation. While some participants described feeling like they lost their home and feelings of uncertainty towards the future, others addressed the idea of coming together and figuring ways to get out of the current situation. Examples of this are: “to build a flag based on new ideas and grow”, “we need to come together as a nation that cares about what keeps going on that affects us”, “we are trying to move forward but the road is dark and difficult,” and “we are suffering and might not be able to see the rainbow after the storm.”

The topic of the grabadores resurfaced in responses for this question. Participants who didn’t know who the figures were expressed curiosity for their role in the new mural. Connoisseurs of the printmakers’ work expressed how this tradition was grounded in fighting for nationalistic values. One participant expressed: “the printmakers would have been proud of the resistance that captures them in the mural today.” Ultimately, participants also spoke of togetherness and a need for action, “We need to help our homeland, lift it from the ground”, “Makes me wonder how can I help the people back home,” and “We need to go to the government offices and kick the indolent politicians.” Whether reflection regarding the future of our island or political action that portrays resistance, the mural successfully sparked a discussion that underlined the necessity for
change. When asked if the mural La Puerta led to a reflection about the current situation of the island; a hundred and four participants responded yes, thirteen felt the complete opposite, while the remaining seven expressed neutrality. These responses sheds light on the importance of the mural La Puerta. Regardless of the passerby agreement or disagreement with the message or technique, the artwork was a catalyst for the contemplation on the crisis that is taking place in Puerto Rico and underlined a necessity for change and action.

**Mirada ciudadana**

The audience reception to the mural concurs with the intentions of the artists. Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia claimed they wanted to “provoke discussions about the current economic, political and social crisis that the Island is facing.” (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22). This was confirmed by 84% of participants who agreed the mural guided them to think about current issues in the archipelago. However, the mural is not only an invitation to reflect; it displays a way of looking at the world, and invitation to join a movement and regard the present situation under a new light. The collective used the black and white Puerto Rican flag to portray their mirada ciudadana. Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia state: “…hope is still present in the white stripes that symbolize individual liberty and its capacity to claim and defend their rights.” (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22). Their mirada ciudadana seeks to achieve liberty for Puerto Ricans through a coming together. The artwork seeks to provoke a discussion on the colonial status, underlining independence as the solution. These ideals are not exclusive to the collective, rather this gaze or mirada ciudadana is shared by others who, after seeing the mural, have joined the conversation.

A very interesting feature of the artistic collective is that like the grabadores before them, the group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia works collaboratively with other movements and social causes. Firstly, they granted permission to the Campamento contra La Junta and the Jornada: Se Acabaron Las Promesas (Journey: Promises are over) to use the black and white Puerto Rican flag in their logos. Secondly, they joined forces with hip-hop group Post Rap in the development and distribution of wheat paste posters along metropolitan cities of the main island. The process of pasting the posters is depicted in a video created for the rap song “1981.” The lyrics in the song denounce the problematics of the colonial status: they describe events of abuse, the
participation of Puerto Rican Soldiers in the US armed forces, the torture of nationalistic leader Pedro Albizu Campos and concludes with a discussion of the rampant corruption of the two main political parties that led us to the bond debt (Post Rap, 2017). The video seeks to convey the necessity for resistance movements that bring a change to the current situation. After watching the video, it is evident that both Post Rap and Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia include Puerto Rican independence as essential in their mirada ciudadana.

La Puerta as Resistance to the United States

Since the artists created the mural on the 4th of July, I wanted to inquire if other Puerto Ricans saw this as a direct opposition to the United States; Figure 17 presents the results. Fifty-four percent of the survey respondents believe La Puerta represents a site of resistance to the US. As expected, responses addressed the time and place as key elements of the response. Some responses that saw the mural as direct opposition to the U.S. expressed: “The mural portrays resistance to every policy or action that goes against our society and country”, “Yes, our homeland is mourning,” and “yes, because we stopped believing in the American dream.” Participants framed the mural as resistance not only to the U.S. but the local government, globalization, and Puerto Ricans in general: “for remaining calm while our country suffers.”

Participants who believed the message in the mural was addressed to the local government expressed: “I believe the three stripes stand for the three governmental powers all of which have worked against local interest and in favor of foreign and US investors.” This response coincides with the intentions of the artists and their open letter: “In present times, the blue triangle represents the three branches of the Government: executive, legislative and judicial. […] The laws, the governors and the courts, up to this moment, have not served in the interests of the people.” (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 22). The similarities between these responses can be seen as a more complete understanding of the artists’ intentions in the pieces. However, this was not a general response but a singular reading of the artwork.
Lastly, several survey respondents believed the mural portrayed resignation, loss of patriotism, and some saw the mural as a mere artistic expression. Some answers explained: “Real resistance would be to keep the colors of our flag,” “It shows sadness and disappointment in our people,” and “Mere painting demonstrates nothing. Vote is the weapon of the citizen.” One of the hopeful responses in this section explained: “We have very few ways to protest and resist. We have lost our voice to colonization and apathy. This mural reminds us we need to resist or we will lose our colors.”

**The Black and White Puerto Rican Flag**

Although La Puerta was not perceived as a site of resistance, the same cannot be said about the black and white Puerto Rican flag. This version has surpassed its existence in the mural. As discussed in Chapter 3, the black and white flag exists as a symbol inside and outside of Puerto Rico. This version of our patriotic symbol is currently being used as a beacon of social struggles for a better Puerto Rico. In the survey, 67% of participants recognized seeing the flag in other places outside of the mural, while 31% did not. The remaining 2% did not provide an answer to the question. Although the black and white flag was recognized by more than half of the participants, to my surprise, it remained as a foreign or new symbol to many.
When asked for an opinion regarding this new flag 46% percent of the responses displayed a negative reception. An example of these answer was: “sad”, “I don’t like it”, “I don’t feel it represents me,” and “it takes away our identity, bring back our colors.” 10% of the responses did not provide an answer to the question, while 6% expressed disregard toward the black and white flag. Out of the 27% who expressed feeling positive about the symbol, their answers explained: “Love it. It signifies that we are waking up.” and "It's a reminder of what we are losing if we don’t do something to regain our colors back". The remaining 11% expressed feeling conflictive, they did not particularly like the black and white flag but saw it as an effective way to convey a message, to bring “conscience to the people.” Regardless of the positive or negative sentiment towards the black and white flag, the topic of accurate representation of the Puerto Rican environment resurfaced. The most common concept referred to in the English responses was “represent.” It was used in the discussion of the crisis and depicted the black and white flag as a symbol of Puerto Rico today. Responses in Spanish had “sadness” as the most commonly used concept. However, expressions of change and actions of resistance also formed part of the answers of respondents who felt sad. For instance, some participants expressed they were “sad but empowered” while another noted: “I don’t like the black flag but it’s a wakeup call to resist and face the challenges happening in PR.”

Although the mural La Puerta was not seen by a majority as a site of resistance. The black and white flag on its own did evoke discussions of resistance movements or organized action. This came as a surprised since the mural itself was not perceived under the same light. A possible explanation could be the use of this flag as a symbol in social movements or its appearance in marches or strikes that resist the government. Future research on the subject can focus on the trajectory of the black and white Puerto Rican flag independent to the mural.

**Grabadores por Grabadores and La Puerta as Sites of Identity**

When asked if each version of the mural represented Puerto Rican identity, a majority of the respondents for both murals answered yes. Figure 18 presents the responses to both questions. For Grabadores por Grabadores 85% of participants answered yes while for La Puerta 80% of respondents agreed. This sheds light on the complex reception of the message in both murals.
Figure 18. Responses that relate the mural to Puerto Rican identity.

It remains clear that most of the participants felt negatively about La Puerta. However, the negative perception did not limit the connection to the mural as representative of Puerto Rican identity. Participants felt that this version responded to a contemporary Puerto Rico. The black and white flag depicted the current crisis, a present element of Puerto Rican identity. It can be argued that both murals attest to identity, different meanings but all-encompassing of being Puerto Rican. This resonates with the artist’s intentions, the group Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia explicitly expressed they did not wanted to portray a message of pessimism but one that empowered and encouraged the viewer to reflect on the current crisis and the possibility of a different Puerto Rico. (Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia, 2016, July 8)
Chapter 6. Conclusions

I approached the topic of study with the idea that the mural Grabadores por Grabadores existed as a site of identity; while the mural La Puerta existed as a site of resistance. The initial part of my hypothesis was confirmed as a majority of participants perceived Grabadores por Grabadores as a mural that celebrated Puerto Ricanness. The second part of my hypothesis proved to be more complex. The mural La Puerta was perceived by most of the respondents as a site of mourning. Some participants addressed the topic of resistance but answers did not display a widespread commonality. For its part the black and white flag was predominantly recognized as a symbol of resistance. Identity however, persisted as a message for both versions of the mural.

On painting resistance

It should remain clear that although the results of the online survey did not support the reading of a message of resistance, Puerto Rican resistance is alive and well. Although the passerby may not perceive the art work as a piece that resists, the artists and other social groups are making it clear that PROMESA and our current political status have not allowed us to become the best and better version of Puerto Rico.

The question of how and who can change a city is multidimensional with an exorbitant number of answers. In the case of Puerto Rico, I believe Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia are working towards producing a change. The artistic collective is reminding the citizenship that they all have agency in finding solutions for the current crisis. I admire the group for fighting in novel ways and fostering critical thinking, as opposed to indoctrinating the passerby. As previously discussed, their work is powerful in its intentions to invoke a personal reflection, to create change from within. As Armstrong expressed: “The street artist is an activist and archivist in one, fighting for new ways of seeing while trying to preserve some semblance of aesthetic uniqueness amongst a sea of cultural forms” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 10). I applaud Artistas Solidarixs y en Resistencia and extend my outmost respect for their work. First of all, for exposing their urban imaginary and choosing a technique they master to adorn our city with powerful political art. Secondly, for sharing their vision of Puerto Rico and helping others
craft their own. If politics have failed us and politicians have used their positions to support their lavish lives; let art be the tool we use to reclaim and remake Puerto Rico.

Silva’s work has guided my research and has helped me arrived to a conclusion. After completing my study, I believe that la ciudad es de quién la vive y sueña (The city belongs to those who live and dream it). For citizens to have ownership of their city, it is not sufficient to reside in it. It is pivotal to have a visions on how to improve your country and find ways to make those dreams a reality. Conformity will leave us with what we have and what is known, waking up with the tenacity of working on improving our surroundings makes us better citizens.
References


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Carta Abierta: un llamado a la solidaridad
7 de julio de 2016
Estimados Hermanxs:

La bandera más de negro, Puerto Rico está en pie de lucha! ¡Aquí se siente el poder.
El arte como vehículo de expresión se ha utilizado a lo largo de la historia para transmitir ideales, provocar reflexiones, transformar e inspirar realidades.
Artistas Solidarixs y en resistencia.

OPEN LETTER: A CALL TO SOLIDARITY
July 7, 2016
To our visiting tourists: The flag is black; Puerto Rico is standing up to fight!
Let it be known!

Artistas Solidarixs y en resistencia.

Posters: Courtesy of Artistas Solidarixs y en resistencia

La Puerta