UNA ESCUELA PARA TRANSFORMAR: LINKING SCHOOLS TO COMMUNITY SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

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The bourgeoning scholarship on community organizing for educational change suggests positives outcomes when it comes to countering failed school reforms. Early reports on community organizing across the United States have shown exponential growth since the 1990s. By 2010, there were 500 of 800 community organizing groups working in the area of school reform. Nevertheless, not all organizing efforts are the same as they are contingent on context, organizational characteristics, phase of organizing, and work (i.e., neighborhood, school district, and state). The purpose of this dissertation was to bring front and center the stories of the community leaders from *Grupo de las Ocho Comunidades del Caño Martín Peña* (G-8, Inc) around their experiences during an educational project that started as a collaborative agreement with the centralized Department of Education of Puerto Rico. Through interviews and document analysis, I present how the G-8's leadership turned to their *apoderamiento comunitario* and *sentido de pertenencia* to implement a curriculum in an elementary school focus on social transformation designed with the participation of residents and community leadership. Following a decolonial stance, I underlined the instances where the community engaged in what I saw as a decolonial act or when there was a manifestation of the logics of coloniality during the emergent collaboration.

For G-8's leadership, it was important to organize in order to challenge the historical government neglect towards *el Caño* that was used as a subterfuge to force them out of their communities. Community leaders also saw the historical abandonment towards *el Caño* in the

pobre educación young people were receiving. Thus, *transformar la educación* and community-school relationship was also part of their organizing work to transform *el Caño*. To accomplish this goal, G-8 established an agreement of collaboration to implement a curriculum in leadership and social transformation built upon the political education of their community organizing work. Thus, the main question in this dissertation is: How has the G8-DEPR collaboration emerged and evolved in the context of the development and implementation of an innovative educational project?

The collaborative agreement evolved in a contentious relationship in which the central and the local school leadership joined forces to impede the full implementation of the curriculum. The educational project for *La Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña* was geared towards reconfiguring the community's place inherent in state sanctioned schooling by centering *la comunidad* and their *lucha comunitaria* in regard to school-community relations. For DEPR leadership, the new educational project was simultaneously a signal to communities to work together with the centralized system and a political project that did not align with the ideological and colonial form of state-sanctioned schooling.

Thus, the tensions around the curriculum content and its implementation between the colonial DEPR and the G-8's leadership denotes how forms of community-school collaboration that are institutionalized hinder the transformative CBO's work. Moreover, when the politics of coloniality deemed community knowledge as not important to bring educational change it will make the collaboration not viable. This was the case of the G8-DEPR's collaboration. The community leadership took the hard decision to retire from the collaboration and find other ways to move forward their educational project.

Para Abuelita, Abuelito y Milton.
Sus oraciones y bendiciones siempre
estarán en medio nuestro.
Les amamos.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For *El Caño's* communities, the dredge of *Caño Martín Peña* (*El Caño*) is a matter of environmental and social justice. For over 17 years, the communities lining *El Caño* have been organizing around this goal by building community capacity through a myriad of initiatives, including informal education. Through these initiatives, the residents of *El Caño* have developed leadership in a multigenerational form. They also built community power by way of democratic and participatory approaches in decision making. As a result, a project that initially was a public-state corporation (*Corporación del Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña-Proyecto Enlace*) became, in words of the former Director of Civic Participation and Social Development, a social movement. Today, community leaders from *El Caño's* communities have been actively engaging in the decision making of the Proyecto Enlace by the main community organizing group, *Grupo de las Ocho Comunidades Aledañas al Caño Martín Peña* (G-8 Inc.).

Through Proyecto Enlace the movement for *El Caño's* environmental restoration have been able to use its social capital to build alliances with academic institutions in and outside of Puerto Rico (including the U.S. mainland), different foundations, the private sector, the banking industry, among others. Community leaders' work had earned recognition around the world, including the UN-Habitat Award for the Caño Martín Peña Land Trust (CMP-LT). These accomplishments are a result of community organizing.

As part of their *Plan de Desarrollo Integral* (PDI) for *el Caño's* social and environmental transformation, G-8, Inc. and Proyecto Enlace turned to bring educational change to an elementary school. Through a collaborative with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) agreement G-8 worked on the development of a curriculum for an elementary school (k-

5). The focus of the curriculum was on leadership and social transformation and was informed mostly from their work with children and youth in leadership development.

In turn, it also speaks to the emergent collaborations between community organizing groups and schools in the context of broader social movements. In community-school collaboration, community organizing de-centers the school from the partnership by putting community needs at the center. Furthermore, this type of collaboration represents an opportunity for community organizing groups to link the school to their social and environmental project (Tarlau, 2014). In *El Caño's* particular story, this is the first time the community have the opportunity to bring their long-time struggle for social and environmental justice into the school with the support of the Department of Education in Puerto Rico.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The ways in which community organizing groups collaborate with schools through curriculum deliberation and design by emphasizing in changing the social and political contexts in their community have not been traditionally considered. Neither, how that collaboration takes shape as been critical in improving the community-school relationship. Particularly, in the context of community social and environmental revitalization and the connection with schools (Niesz et al., 2018; Niesz & Krishnamurthy, 2014). To understand how community organizing groups, link a public school with their struggle, an examination on the actions and work done by community organizing groups through collaboration with a centralized department of education, community participation in the curriculum design, the implementation of the curriculum, can facilitate that a school became a vehicle for social transformation.

The purpose of this study focused on the collaboration between a community organizing group in *El Caño* (a group of eight communities bordering a contaminated water channel in San

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Juan, Puerto Rico) with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (). This collaboration revolved around the implementation of an educational project with an emphasis on leadership and social transformation. This study aims to understand how this emergent collaboration takes places in the context of the organizing work lead by G-8, Inc. and the support of Enlace, to revitalized *el Caño*'s ecosystem while guaranteeing the permanence of the communities.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Community-school partnerships are recognized as an essential asset for teaching and learning (Auerbach, 2010; Epstein et al., 2019; Perkins, 2015; Warren, Hong, Leung, Phitsamay, & Uy, 2009). For instance, one of the community components that often seek to develop a partnership with schools are community-based organizations (CBOs). According to Warren and colleagues, CBOs aim to "foster school and community development" (p. 2010) through collaboration with school-based educators (Warren et al., 2009). This collaboration can take the form of organizing through community organizing groups. As stated by Warren and colleagues, community organizing aims for the active involvement of caregivers and community members "in advocating for themselves as the primary means of influencing decision makers in the institutions that affect them" (Warren et al. as cited by Ishimaru, 2014, p. 189). Here, this type collaboration allows schools and communities to move beyond the conventional school-community partnerships (Ishimaru, 2014) centered in parental involvement "as a mean to the end of raising students' achievement" (Auerbach, 2010, p. 729).

Furthermore, community organizing in schools also moves away from the deficit approaches in community-school partnerships that might further marginalize community participation in schools because of race or ethnicity (Ishimaru, 2014). By leveraging their social and political power, community organizing groups aim to actively participate in the decision-

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making regarding school issues that are affecting them and their children. This form of participation also aim to shift the paradigm of school-community partnerships that position students, families and communities as clients (Sanders, 2009; Shirley, 2009).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The actions engage by community organizing groups could result in tensions or collaborations between community organizing groups and school administrators (Gold et al., 2004). Either way, community organizing groups' actions aim to change institutional policy, practices, and structure (Fuentes, 2012) by de-centering the school initiatives for community involvement. These "school-centered" initiatives (Warren, 2005) mostly revolve around academic achievement while framing the community and families in a deficit way. These initiatives has been "responsible" for what in essence is a result of structural inequalities (Alemán, 2007; Ishimaru, 2014; Moll et al., 1992; Valencia, 2002). Thus, when community organizing groups are engaging in this type of actions, they are building collective community power (Fuentes, 2012; Warren, 2005), using their cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), and creating accountability for public institutions (Gold et al.,2004). Nevertheless, community groups that come into the schools with an organizing history have already been able to draw from these experiences in order to shift the paradigm of "school-centered" initiatives.

At the same time, community organizing groups see in public schools an opportunity to link their broader organizing agenda to schools. Here I am referring to the intentional actions of transforming the practices and structure of particular public schools to strength and/or advance social change in their immediate communities while contributing to school reform. By drawing from their community power and educational experiences, community organizing groups can disrupt the social reproduction of inequalities.

Therefore, linking public schools to community organizing work simultaneously transform the institutional practices, policies, and structures as part of the larger social change lead by these communities (Fuentes, 2012; Tarlau, 2014). By linking schools to the organizing work from community groups, schools are also disconnecting from the reproduction of the same inequalities community organizing groups are fighting to end. At the same time, these community organizing groups contain pedagogical dimensions and informal educational process for mobilizing (Tarlau, 2014) that can transform traditional pedagogical practices in schools. Therefore, the pedagogical, administrative and institutional practices in general, should respond to the goals of transformation outlined by community organizing groups. In short, the problem space this work addresses is around how/in what ways a community-based organization can link public school to their social and movement through the implementation of a curriculum designed by community organizing groups.

Research Questions

The questions that are guiding this project focus on the collaboration between G-8, Inc. and DEPR in the context of the community organizing work to revitalize and transform *el Caño* and their communities are the following:

1) How has the collaboration between *El Caño*'s community based-organization, G-8, Inc., and the centralized DEPR emerged and evolved in the context of the development and implementation of an innovative educational project with a focus on leadership and social transformation in a public elementary school?

   a. To what extent, have other community initiatives lead by G-8, Inc. and Enlace, informed the emergent collaboration and the curriculum design process?

2) How did the G-8, Inc. leadership involved in the curriculum deliberation process seek to accomplish their goals of social and environmental justice with the implementation of a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation in a local elementary school within the context of *El Caño's* environmental restoration project? How did this process impact the G8-DEPR's collaboration?

With these questions I aimed to foreground the collective experiences from the community leaders in forging a collaboration with a centralized department of education to improve the sub-standard education *el Caño*'s youths have had to navigate in the school public system. My interest revolves around how the community educational project aimed to develop a generation of community leaders by designing a curriculum focus on leadership and social transformation and what role the DEPR leadership played in its implementation in a public elementary school.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Through a critical ethnographic approach, the focus of this case study is on the emergent collaboration between community organizing groups advocating for the completion of *El Caño's* environmental restoration project and an elementary school. While research traditionally aims to pursue knowledge for the field (Patel, 2016), this project seeks to contribute to decolonial/decolonizing efforts in educational research with communities and their relationship with schools by centering *El Caño's* "*vivencias*" (Ortega y Gasset as cited in Wallerstein & Duran, 2008, p. 28) as the source of knowledge. Notably, the efforts lead by *El Caño* to improve the social, economic and environmental conditions for all the residents by building social and political power through organizing community groups. This way, this case study can generate greater awareness of the collaborations between community-based organizations and schools in

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the context of social and environmental organizing work lead by those groups to transform their neighborhoods.

Therefore, las *vivencias* from *El Caño's* collaboration with the elementary school and the context/place where it is taking place are essential to understanding how this emergent partnership is taking place. The future stories that will be part of this project will serve firstly, to document the efforts from the community to build power into the school and facilitate a process of reflection of the community participation in this process that can lead to future actions in order to strengthen this emergent collaboration. From *El Caño's vivencias*, other communities and schools can develop their forms of collaboration that is responsive to the just and equitable well-being of the communities hosting the schools. Furthermore, this project contributes to documenting how context shapes the nature and scale of change community organizing groups can bring into schools, and document community organizing group's contribution to teaching and learning.

AUDIENCE

Embedded in the stories shared by *el Caño*'s leadership and the collaborators involved in the community and educational organizing work there is a theory of action I believe can be leveraged to engage learning discussions through a myriad of fields. For instance, scholars in the field of community social work, which happens to be key in the multi-generational organizing work in *el Caño*, have collaborated around youth leadership programs (Orrusti Ramos et al., 2007) and migrants participation in community organizing (Rosa Rosa, 2018). Also, scholars from urban planning has done work around community land trust and urban revitalization (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019). Hence, the richness embedded in *el Caño*'s theory of action for organizing presented in this dissertation might speak as well across learning

communities that see in community and educational organizing work multiple forms to transform public education while unsettling the colonial project of schooling. In this vein, I hope this work extends to learning communities interested in teacher education and curriculum theory. However, I prioritize community organizers for educational change in this narrative, and how the stories shared by *el Caño*'s leadership can shed insight into their theory of action towards ways of (re)imagine community organizing and public education collaboration to bring educational change. Specifically, this commitment showed how I have chosen to relay my findings.

I sought to response to the G8's request to record how/why the educational work took place and for what purposes. Thus, I relayed in a chronological narrative of the events with the historical, political, economic and social background of the "oldest colony" in the globe. With this background, I turned to a decolonial stance to learn about G-8 and Enlace's community organizing work in light of coloniality and in search of decolonization (Maldonado-Torres 2007). In short, the decolonial turn affords to understand the G-8's theory of action of their community organizing as a form of decolonial work to unsettle the project of coloniality in Puerto Rico's public education and beyond.

The stories presented in this project can also be heard/read in multiple forms. For instance, one reading approach could be community narrative. Rappaport (2000) describes community narrative as a common story among a group of people which "may be shared through social interaction, texts, pictures, performances, and rituals" (p. 4). While the affordances of this narrative approach are out of the scope of this section, it should be noted the strong common story among the collaborators of this project in respect to both the community and educational work to bring change in *el Caño*. This common story stems from a shared *sentido de pertenencia* toward the *tierra de sus ancestros* (EQ, Interview) and the lived experiences to defend their right

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to stay in that land. Even greater, EQ shared in an interview how she came to understood their experience to transform their communities as a broad shared experience when she had the chance to hear the struggle to defend the land from people around the globe. Hence, the narrative within the stories shared in this project could be rendered as a community narrative.

To sum up, it is important to restate how the theory of action within the *el Caño*'s organizing work allow for a multi reading toward political, economic, social transformation, including considering the possibilities of community work as decolonial act to transform public education. As a teacher and a researcher, I believe in the imperative of collaborating with communities like *el Caño* that engage in bringing change to public education in order to move forward projects of decolonization.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Young people from *El Caño* have recognized that schools are not traditionally places where youths learn how to critically challenge social and economic policies like the ones mentioned above, but rather, schools in Puerto Rico (as in other societies) are sites of cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Mills, 2008). As a result, state sanctioned schooling perpetuates social injustices targeting primarily historically colonized communities through neoliberal educational policies that are legacies of colonialism. These legacies of colonialism are latent through the project of coloniality which aim to perpetuate an "Eurocentric education system of assimilation/marginalization in a monocultural project disguised as universal" (Baker, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, the new school project is the first in its kind that aims to disrupt a school system that perpetuates, not only the social injustices affecting their community, but also that privileges forms of knowledges that marginalized their experiences and *filosofía comunitaria*.

In this chapter, I examine how colonialism as a pattern of power (i.e., coloniality), as it has taken shape in schooling, and in particular in Puerto Rico, has been used to advance an imperialistic agenda. I examine coloniality in US education in order to pay particular attention to the historicity of practices of deculturalization and colonization of Black, Indigenous and other historically colonized communities. Also, how those practices remain pervasive in schooling today. To do so, this chapter takes three turns. First, I briefly explain how a decolonial framework will serve to string together the history of colonialism and colonization in U.S. schooling and the global South. Then, I shortly explain how the U.S. occupation in Puerto Rico

has led to aggressive educational policies in the attempt to Boricua's[1] deculturalization and Americanization, and how these practices relate to same policies implemented in Indigenous, African American, and Mexican communities in the Mainland. The purpose of presenting the project of deculturalization in U.S schooling is to trace, as Baquedano-López et. al. (2014) suggested, how the legacies of colonization in education have enabled subjugating practices for young people of color. In my second turn, I describe how the same educational policies of deculturalization towards colonially marginalized communities (Rosa, 2018) are still pervasive in today's school classrooms. Lastly, I discussed how communities engage in decoloniality through community and educational organizing work within the same state-sanctioned school to fight racist educational policies and to re-link with their knowledges and cultural ways of beings by disrupting school spaces.

SEARCHING FOR DECOLONIZATION: A DECOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

Colonialism is something *el Caño'*s families have experiencing in what some call "the oldest colony" in the world, Puerto Rico. Thus, to engage in this work I take a *giro decolonial* (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) to discuss community-school partnership and community organizing for educational change (educational organizing) in Puerto Rico from the decolonial perspective "in light of coloniality and the search for decolonization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) "as a necessary contribution towards decolonizing knowledge and education" (Baker, 2012, p. 13).

Before moving forward on the question of coloniality/decoloniality, is important to differentiate between colonialism and coloniality, as well from decolonization and decoloniality. For this purpose, I follow Maldonado-Torres (2016), "*Outline of the Ten Theses on Coloniality*

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[1] Boricua, or its formal version Borinqueño/a, is another name given to people from Puerto Rico or Puerto Rican descent. Boricua is at the same a reference to Borinkén, the way the indigenous Taínos named what today's known as Puerto Rico. I'll be using it interchangeably.

and Decoloniality." Maldonado-Torres (2016) notes that is important to distinguish between each of these constructs to challenge the modern/colonial attitude that holds and reproduce in education (e.g., academic scholarship) "in the guise of neutral and rational assessments, postracialism, and well-intentioned liberal values" (p. 8) when facing the questions of colonialism and decolonization (p. 10). He argues that most often colonialism and decolonization are depicted as historical episodes that have been superseded and locked in the past (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10). Maldonado-Torres (2016) further argues that from this perspective questioning the meaning and significance of these socio-historical and geopolitical conditions "appears as anachronic-as if they exist in a different time" ignoring the influences of colonialism and the imperative of decolonization (p.10).

This empirical approach bears some parallel with the ways in which decolonization is used as a metaphor in educational research to equate material decolonizing projects to other "civil and human rights-based social justice projects" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2). In words of the authors:

> When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3)

By moving away from the romantic aspiration of decolonization in educational research we recognized the aspirations for decolonization across the globe as political projects that aim to unsettle the nation-state empires, as is the case of Puerto Rico. Hence, discussing educational organizing with a decolonial turn includes "diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem for the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of

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decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 2). This last part of decoloniality as a necessary task is where I would argue communities, youth, and educators can collaborate in the political project of fighting coloniality (Mignolo, 2017) through community organizing.

According to Baker (2012), from the coloniality standpoint modern schooling is reframed as a modern/colonial institution as it is situated within the historical expansion of modern/colonial civilizational project (p. 13). As a result, modern schooling has been used as a way to erase the languages, literacies, cultures, and histories from Indigenous communities across the lands of Turtle Island and Abya Ayala since its inception (then and now as part of coloniality). This dehumanizing practices of assimilation can be understood as a deculturalization project where others can only became "real human beings[2]" (Fanon, 1967) on the basis of White knowledge and White history (Mignolo, 2009). This logic aims for deculturalization as "a way to reseat property rights and whiteness, which are extension of the settler (colonizer) logics" (Patel, 2016, p. 93). In other words, the deculturalization project in schooling not only aims to dehumanize racialized populations, but also to disposes, divest, and discipline them (Patel, 2016). As a result, these forms of dehumanization are pervasive in schools through the discourses of White supremacy, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Blackness, and heteronormativity (Paris & Alim, 2017).

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[2] As noted by Mignolo (2009), in his work *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon (1967) describe the epistemic experience of Black folks from the Antilles whom "will be proportionally whiter – that is, will *come closer to being a real human* – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French Language" (emphasis in the original, pp. 17-18). From Fanon's work we can rethink about ontology "in light of coloniality and the search of decolonization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242). Specifically, Maldonado – Torres (2007) stress how ontological colonial differences (differences between Being and what lies below Being) is a product of coloniality of Being (others are not). The differences between Being and others can also be understood as the self/Other relationship, or what Bhabha (1994) calls the colonizing self and the colonized Other.

Historical colonized communities across the globe have continued to experience state-sanctioned schooling as a way to assimilate the White imperial project (Paris & Alim, 2017). That is, "students and families being asked to lose their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1) and adopt White middle-class norms. Thus, decoloniality aims to:

> rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10).

This point captures how communities' actions that aim to unsettle state-sanctioned schooling at the epistemological and ontological level can be consider decolonial actions. This means unsettling racism, and other isms young people and their communities have had to navigate for generations as legacies of colonialism (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014). From a decolonial perspective, this illustrate how coloniality transcends colonial relationships. While a political and economic relationship between people and a nation-state empire may have ended, the patterns of power resulting from that relationship (i.e. colonialism) endure by the definitions of culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production that emerge from that relationship (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Therefore, coloniality dictates the epistemic and social practices of human relations.

SCHOOLING IN THE COLONY

"President McKinley declared to the writer that it was his desire 'to put the conscience

of the American people in the islands of the sea'. This has been done."

Martin G. Brumbaugh, 1903

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The quote used to open this section comes from the preface of the book "*History of Puerto Rico: from the Spanish discovery to the American occupation,*" published five years after the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico. The book editor, and writer of the preface, was the first Commissioner of Education for Puerto Rico (1900-1901) during the military government. Before being assassinated, the wish of President McKinley to put the "conscience of American people" in the people from Philippines to Puerto Rico respond in some way to the fact that he was the person who led the occupation of Puerto Rico. From his colonialist's gaze (Thompson, 2017) he saw the inhabitants of "their" new territory as people in need to be save. In fact, in the same preface Brumbaugh refer to McKinley as "the founder of human liberty in Puerto Rico" (Van Middeldyk, 1903, p. viii). Paradoxically, this "liberation" from the previous rulers (the Spanish Empire) came under military violence and a colonial rule that have lasted until today.

To establish the "American conscience" into the people of Puerto Rico, the new colonizers resorted on schools (Cabán, 1999). The non-grade schooling system under the "old rulers" was not accessible to all children and young people. The educational policy under Spain was keeping the population "under the mantle of ignorance" (Navarro-Rivera, 2013). According to Navarro-Rivera (2013), citing the 1901 Annual Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education for Puerto Rico, by the time of the U.S. invasion, schools were scarce in Puerto Rico. As a result, 80 % of the school age population lacked resources to attend school, and 70% of young people were illiterate. Under these conditions, the U.S. military regime prioritize the schooling project as part of the conquest of Puerto Rico and the rest of the invaded islands.

Moved by seeing themselves as "the founders of human liberty" and the *instauradores* of a "new conscience," the colonizers (i.e., U.S.) used schooling in their attempt to deculturized Puerto Ricans youth. Moreover, the educational process of deculturalization in Puerto Rico

shared similarities with the deculturalization programs instituted by the U.S. government in Indigenous, African American and Mexican communities that were in placed in the Mainland (Spring, 2007). For instance, as it happened with Indigenous young people in the boarding schools and Mexicans in the southwest (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), English became the language of instruction suppressing the use of students' home language. In Puerto Rico, the new state-sanctioned school system's apparent benevolence aimed to produce a new workforce for the incoming agricultural landlords and obedient colonial subjects (Thompson, 2013). Put it in another way, with the exploitation of land for incoming sugar industry it was necessary a trained workforce ready to be exploited as well without resistance. For this purpose, the new educational policies aimed for the deculturalization and Americanization of the new colonial subjects. Through the imposition of English as the language of instruction, the celebration of U.S. patriotic holidays, patriotic exercise as pledging allegiance to the flag, among others policies, young people in schools (Negrón de Montilla, 1990; Spring, 2007). It is important to note that while Puerto Rico was not a full independent nation by the time of the U.S. invasion, it had an autonomous government, and a strong Puerto Rican national identity.

Therefore, the educational policies from the new rulers were targeting the bourgeon Puerto Rican culture using language as the vehicle for the implementation of the "American conscience". This is how deculturalization took place in Puerto Rico, by replacing the Puerto Rican culture with the American culture (Spring, 2007). This form of colonization was not passively accepted by either teacher or students. As mentioned above, before the U.S. occupation, Puerto Rico had gained autonomy from the Spanish Empire and a Puerto Rican culture was bourgeoning and recognized. As a result, the mandatory use of English as the language of instruction faced resistance by teachers and students alike. Teachers organized

around the *Asociación de Maestros*[3] to fight back the policies of English only in schools. Students were expelled from schools for collecting signatures asking for legislation that allows schools to teach in *Español*, while also going to strike for their right to learn and been taught in *Español*. Although Spanish is a language of colonization, the claim from teachers and students to teach in *Español* was not connected to the old colonizers. In fact, it was tied to the bourgeoning Boricua collective identity of the time. However, some would argue that the language defense was more related to the political class' Hispanophilia of the that time (Duany, 2002). Fast forward in time, schools in Puerto Rico use *Español* as the language of instruction showing how the efforts for deculturize and Americanize Puerto Ricans through schooling failed or had limited success. Today, not only is Spanish the language of instruction, but also the cultural traditions are maintained and celebrated in schools and public spaces[4].

While the current commonwealth constitutional government gives Puerto Rico autonomy to dictates educational policies, it continues to be a colony of the United States. As a result, Puerto Rico (as a non-incorporated territory) answers to high stake federal educational policies in order to receive federal funding. Furthermore, some of these policies are the same neoliberal policies that are taking place around the globe, including the closing of schools (Basu, 2007; Conner & Monahan, 2015; Witten, Kearns, Lewis, Coster, & McCreanor, 2003). The

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[3] The Asociación de Maestros of Puerto Rico is today's public teachers' union recognized by the Department of Education. It was founded in 1911 and it continue to be one of the voices in the defense of public education in Puerto Rico.

[4] The fact that Puerto Rico's school do celebrate la Puertorriqueñidad, is also a result of the political project that lead to the current Constitution of Puerto Rico. The Constitution of 1952 came as a result of the International pressure to end colonialism. The U.S. Congress then, approved the Puerto Rican Constitution redacted by local politicians giving the autonomy to Puerto Rico to develop their government and social institutions. This included the adoption of the Spanish as the official language, along with English. The Puerto Rican flag that once was symbol of the independent movement, was co-opted by the new government even though the same government persecuted the political groups that publicly raised the flag. Now the flag fly along with the U.S. flag in schools and public institutions remembering the colonial condition of Puerto Rico. However, no school pledge alliance to either flag as it was done in the past to the U.S. flag. For further reading about the cultural and political implications of the U.S. in/through schooling see del Moral (2013), Torres-González (2002), and Negrón-Montilla (1990).

enforcement of these policies by the local colonial administration has added to the maintenance

of the colonial relationship with the U.S. As I have been arguing, the maintenance of coloniality

in post-colonial contexts at the epistemic level resort from state sanctioned schooling practices

(e.g., textbooks content design). In the case of Puerto Rico, as a colony, coloniality and the

colonial relationship with the U.S. is simultaneously maintained through schooling practices. For

many years in the social studies textbooks, Puerto Rico was geographically presented as an

island without mentioning the two outer islands (i.e., Culebra and Vieques) that were used for

U.S. Navy's military practices for decades since World War II. While the two islands were used

for military use, its population were subject to the constant bombing and direct contamination

from depleted uranium and Agent Orange used during the exercises[5]. The problem with teaching

students that Puerto Rico was an island would tell them (in)directly that what was happening in

those islands was not happening in Puerto Rico. It was not after a disobedience movement lead

by social and political organizations[6] put pressure on the presidencies of Clinton and Bush to

take the Navy out of Vieques, the geography of Puerto Rico began to be presented in the new

textbooks as an archipelago. Here, the massive civil disobedience movement lead to a collective

epistemic disobedience.

While the national civil disobedience movement changed the narrative of what land was

Borinqueña and exposed the colonial relationship between U.S. and Puerto Rico (for the nth

time), business continues as usual. Now with a Federal Fiscal Board (known in Puerto Rico as *La

Junta*) appointed by an act of Congress during the Obama administration, schools in Puerto Rico

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[5] Still today, the cleaning of the land is not completed and Vieques population continues to struggle with the repercussion of the highly contaminated land. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/
[6] This was the second time a civil disobedience movement to get the U.S. Navy exercise to stop. Culebra was the first. https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Bush-will-tell-Navy-to-leave-Vieques-Fear-of-2908906.php

have been closing and the University of Puerto Rico is facing budget cut as a result of austerity measures imposed by *La Junta*. Now the U.S. is using the same strategies of the old colonizers by keeping the population under a mantle of ignorance by making education a privilege for the few. For example, la Junta have issued instructions to the government of cutting funding to teachers only pension fund, cutting funds to University of Puerto Rico system while raising the tuition by 105% and other austerity policies affecting workers' rights security.

The history and current state of Puerto Rican schools is not different from the schools in the U.S. The deculturization and Americanization of young people through schooling in order to "put the conscience of the American people" in the colonial subjects has been part of the White Imperial Project (Paris & Alim, 2017). As in the U.S., school funding is a problem for underserved communities and school-sanctioned policies are subjected to the administration in power. However, Puerto Ricans (in the colony and the mainland) have had endure the violence of this historical form of assimilation.

Disaster Capitalism in Education

After hurricane *María* devastated Puerto Rico, people across and beyond the archipelago echoed this narrative: *El Huracán María levantó el manto de la pobreza*/Hurricane María unveiled the poverty in Puerto Rico. While this expression fairly expresses the economic conditions the natural devastation left, it is important to note the historical context of this natural disaster. By the time hurricane *María* was approaching Puerto Rico with 175 mph wind gusts, a $72 billion on public debt, which led to the appointment of *La Junta*, was already sinking Puerto Ricans into misery. In 2016, a year before *María,* the median income per family was $20,078 (Guzmán, 2017) which is under the federal poverty line for a family of four. Two years after the hurricanes 30,000 homes' are still covered by FEMA's blue tarps (Rivera Sánchez, 2019). Some

of these homes are located in the communities of *El Caño* and can be seen from airplanes when landing at the International Airport. In terms of education, under the last two administrations, an aggressive plan of school closures was taking place under the premise of fiscal restructuration leaving communities without access to public schools. The communities of *El Caño* are one of those to experience the implementation of this policy closing 4 of 7 schools in their district. Therefore, while communities in Puerto Rico, particularly in *El Caño*, has been experiencing these historical economic and social injustices, *María* created the conditions for capital and private sector to continue to profiting from disaster.

The idea of disaster capitalism (Klein, 2007) helps to explain how disasters, like Hurricanes Karina in New Orleans and *María* in Puerto Rico, are systematically devised through public policy to benefits the corporate-private sector for profiting from the disaster itself and the eventual recovery efforts (Salazar Perez & Cannella, 2011; Saltman, 2007). As Salazar Pérez and Canella, among others have argued, neoliberal governments, like Puerto Rico's, take advantage of crippling economic in post-disaster scenario to implement neoliberal policies resorting from what Klein (2007) calls the "shock doctrine."

With New Orleans as "the prime experiment" (Buras, 2011) for the implementation of neoliberal policies in post disaster scenarios, Puerto Rico's neoliberal government followed suit by creating the educational policy necessary for disaster capitalism's agenda. At this moment is important to re state how the global neoliberal agenda that others have identified as the dominant paradigm in educational policies is also connected to the legacies of colonialism (Au, 2016; Shahjahan, 2011; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). Therefore, is important to note that New Orleans and Puerto Rico share parallel experiences under colonialism. New Orleans is situated in a settler colonial nation-state that historically and systematically disinvested and neglected African

American Education (Buras, 2011; Knoester & Au, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Similarly, Puerto Rico as a U.S. colony has had a public education system undermined by corrupt colonial administrations, resulting in the disinvestment of the education from most of the communities that lived under poverty (Rosado Ortiz, 2012). However, in Puerto Rico there is no study that have looked at the relation between race and educational inequality.

In the case of post-María Puerto Rico, after a failed attempt during the previous administration (thanks to a multisectoral social opposition) current Governor Ricardo Rossello didn't wait a year after *María* to make into law an educational reform that would open the door to charter schools and voucher programs. In the opening paragraph of the "*Ley de Reforma Educativa de Puerto Rico-Ley 85*" is explicitly stated that the educational policies in the public education system will follow an equal investment per student across districts and simultaneously stablish charter schools under the policy of "*Escuelas Públicas Alianza*". While in Puerto Rico school districts exists, the way they are governed work different from New Orleans and the rest of the school districts across the U.S. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) manages everything related to schools across districts, from educational policies to be implemented in schools to standards and curriculum design, from schools' budget to teachers and administrators' recruitment. So, implementing a nationwide education reform that includes charter schools came natural for the DEPR, not only because of the centralized power its holds but also because of the neoliberal agenda the two governing political parties have historically enforced during their interchangeable tenures. Furthermore, DEPR is also subject to federal accountability requirements (e.g., NCLB) which put an additional burden on schools' communities. After closing 255 schools in the past two years, the DEPR continued with the implementation of charter schools at a slow pace. The first charter school to fully worked under

the new reform was managed by Boys and Girls Club-Puerto Rico, opening the door to more charter schools.

COLONIALITY IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Current forms of schooling and its high-stake educational policies are part of maintaining colonialism's patterns of power (i.e. coloniality) (Baquedano☐López, Hernandez, & Alexander, 2014; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2017; Quijano, 2007). As legacies of colonialism in schooling (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014), others have thoroughly discussed how these educational policies of accountability driven by high-stakes assessment has stigmatized communities of color across the U.S. (Ladson-Billing, 2006; Sloan, 2007; Valencia & Villareal, 2003; Zacher Pandya, 2011) while at the same time aggravated social inequalities (Campano, Ghiso, Sánchez, 2013). The exclusionary practices enacted in school sanctioned educational system aimed to maintain White-European centered cultural norms (Romero, 1994; Valdés, 1996) have minimized and erased ways of knowing from colonially nondominant communities (Baquedano☐López et al., 2014; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Tuck, 2009). For San Pedro (2015) these form of educational practices in U.S. schooling "reify settler colonial[7] discourses as the 'norm' in public schools" (p. 135). This is tightly connected to the White imperial project of schooling that aimed to "whitewashed" the school standardized curriculum in pluri-ethnic and pluri-lingual schools (Irizarry, 2017; San Pedro, 2015).

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[7] The U.S. settler colonial project is a form of colonization in which the primary structure of people, land, and relation is through settler colonialism (Byrd, 2011 as cited in Patel, 2014, p. 361). However, settler colonialism differs from other forms of colonization because it's not aim for its permanency but to supersede the conditions of its operation (Veracini, 2011). Veracini (2011) explains that while colonial systems are determined to sustain a permanent subordination of the colonized for the sake of exploitation, settler colonialism "end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguishing indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity (…) towards its self-suppression" (p. 2-3). This operation is drive by its own logic: "land is property, and people are differentially positioned relative to their ability to own it" (Patel, 2014, p. 361). For Patel (2014), this settler colonial structure shapes "our relationships to the land, to each other, and to knowledge and learning" (p. 361).

Educational policies aiming to stigmatize racialized communities of color in the U.S., and across the globe, are a result of the patterns of power that emerge from colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007). For example, it is well document how heavily policed schools in communities of color and the exclusionary disciplinary consequences experience by young people, have sustain the school – to – prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). This form of criminalizing Black and Brown young people through the enforcement of unjust discipline policies "forcibly (…) proscribe [them] from the Human status by means of the rapidly expanding U.S. prison – industrial complex" (Wynter, 2003, p. 329). The proscription of Black and Brown youth "from the Human status" is not merely a metaphor rather a systemic State policy enforces by the police with brutal violence against young people of color in and out of school. The continuous criminalization and physical/spatial marginalization of students because of race and ethnicity, epitomize the problem of coloniality communities of color have been experiences ever since in state – sanctioned schooling. Furthermore, the re-segregation in American schools puts in peril the quality of public education for Black, Brown and other non-White young folks in the post Brown v. Board of Education Era (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Orfield, 2007; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Orfield & Yun, 1999).

On the other hand, Baquedano-López et. al. (2014), citing Césaire (1956/2010), note how the racist relations behind the "civilizing function" of schooling reinforce the dominant discourse (i.e., White-European centered cultural norms) contained in educational policies that define what is best for *familias* Latinas and other non-dominant groups in the U.S. (p. 17). For the authors, this "colonial administration" aims to manufactured crisis through the false notions of academic achievement and individualism. Baquedano-López and her colleagues call for changing the

everyday materiality and condition in schools while also actively recovering and repositioning subjugated knowledge (p. 18). An example we can learn from, for instance, is the collaborative work of Megan Bang and colleagues in creating a community – based science curricula as part of a community design research that includes the participation from elder, parents, teachers, content community experts, youth, and other members from the Chicago – Menominee Indigenous community. For Bang and her colleagues, "recognizing and honoring Indigenous epistemological practices and orientations as relevant to science and science learning" (Bang & Medin, 2010, p. 11) was pivotal in the design of sustainable learning environments in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education for young Indigenous people. The repositioning of Indigenous knowledge systems in schooling practices, in this case through the design of community – based science curricula, represent a delink from the settler colonial discourse as a decolonial act in order to re-exist.

For the school-sanctioned colonial project, children families, and their community members, are both expendable and an obstacle. The predominantly White middle-class values present in U.S. federally funded educational policy had historically constructed that any knowledge and cultural practice other than White knowledge and cultural practice, is both a problem and the cause for school failure (Baquedano□López et al., 2014; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Historically, this deficit narrative contained in federal funded educational policies had pushed for the separation of children from their families (e.g., Boarding Schools), and targeted poor parents as problems (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014, p.21). In other words, the deficit narratives of the cultural practices from non-dominant communities within the context of schooling are a result of the centering of whiteness in educational policies as the goal for academic achievement (Alemán, 2009; Gillborn, 2005). Consequently, the participation of

families, and community members in the process of schooling is pushed further into the margins. For this reason, communities resorted from a myriad of strategies to change the schooling practices that historically have oppressed them in order to change the everyday materiality and condition in schools while also actively recovering and repositioning their knowledge and cultural practices (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014).

Decolonial Actions in and from Communities

In this section I highlight the actions community-based organizations (CBOs), caregivers, youth, educators and other members from colonially marginalized communities (Rosa, 2018) engage in decoloniality. Discussing schooling with a decolonial turn includes "diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem for the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 2). This last part of decoloniality as a necessary task is where I would argue communities, youth, and educators can collaborate in this political project of fighting coloniality (Mignolo, 2017). According to Mignolo (2017), decoloniality aims to "delink [from the CMP] in order to re-exist" by "relinking with the legacies one wants to preserve in order to engage in *modes of existence*" that once were "histories disavowed, diminished and demonized in the narratives of Western modernity [i.e., modern discourses]" (p. 40-41). For the author, decoloniality is a call for both civil and epistemic disobedience which should operate on pluri-versality and truth which makes re-existing something more than resisting. For instance, language revitalizing efforts lead by young Indigenous people across the globe respond to the historically disownment, diminishment and demonization of their language through schooling. Therefore, from a decolonial point of view, they are engaging in decoloniality.

This act of decoloniality happens as a form of counteracting deficit framing within educational policies (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Baquedano□López et al., 2014; Valencia, 2002, 2011; Yosso, 2005). This deficit-based narrative emerges from the legacies of family separation and deculturalization through schooling that colonially marginalized communities (Rosa, 2018) have been subject to, with the purpose of "civilizing" the Other. As a result, the ways youth and their families' community cultural practices are framed within the educational policies will dictate the integration of communities' sociocultural and historical landscape to the schooling experience. Furthermore, these educational policies disavow and diminish community's knowledges, cultural practices, and histories. This is true not only in the U.S. but also in other countries across the globe deepening the injustices local communities face (Fiske & Ladd, 2006; Gillborn, 2005). Therefore, changing the conditions of schooling experience is a political act for these communities.

In short, delinking from the White imperial project of schooling (Paris & Alim, 2017) by engaging in "civil and epistemic disobedience" aims to relink with the legacies and *modes of existence*" that historically coloniality have "disavowed, diminished and demonized" (Mignolo, 2017, p. 40-41) through the deficit-narratives of educational policies. While most of these actions are not identified as decolonial political acts by the *protagonistas* of the initiatives presented here, the fact that they aim to de-center White-European dominant discourse and the false notion of academic performance in schooling makes these actions decolonial ones.

Re-linking, Re-existing. Youth, families, and communities have organized to address the issues they face and have taken action to ask for change in their schools. These education movements are mostly in response to the educational policies enforced by the schools that communities understand attempt to students' wellbeing as community members and further

marginalized family members in the education process of their children. For instance, during the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, along with the establishment of policies of accountability through high-stake standardized testing, the caregivers authority to shape local policy was shrank (Mitra, Mann, & Hlavacik, 2016). On the other hand, while the recent re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (i.e., Every Student Succeeds Act) increased parental rights for school involvement and the opt-out policy for states, it still requiring 95% of participation in standardized tests to make Adequate Year Progress (Mitra et. al., 2016). Nevertheless, caregivers continue to opt their children out from high-stake testing as a way to contend educational policies. In response to these dehumanizing educational practices, communities have worked towards decoloniality.

Youth in particular have been vocal in pointing out how their schooling experience attempts against their freedom by assaulting their cultural and linguistic identities (Irizarry, 2011; Paris, 2012). For instance, in response to the ban of ethnic studies in Arizona in 2011, a youth coalition took different actions asking for the maintenance of the Mexican American Studies (MAS), offered in Tucson's public schools since 1960's (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodríguez, 2013). Their actions have not been limited to denouncing the educational policies that silence them, but they have engaged in what Mignolo (2017) calls epistemic and civil disobedience as part of the process of decoloniality. Before the ban took place, a takeover of the School Board and other protests were led by the United Non-Discriminatory Individuals in Demanding Our Studies (UNIDOS). The youth coalition comprised by local Tucson students, aimed to stop the ban (Cabrera et. al., 2013, p. 9). Despite their efforts, the ban was in place allowing "Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction to withhold 10% of a district's funding if s/he determined that a district offers classes" that [among other things] are "designed primary for pupils of a

particular ethnic group" (Cabrera et. al., 2013, p. 9). Nevertheless, UNIDOS led school walkouts, which were framed in a deficit way by media and school authorities. In addition, UNIDOS "created a day-long School of Ethnic Studies were students could learn from the forbidden MAS curriculum" (Cabrera et. al., 2013, p. 8). The youth civil and epistemic disobedience to fight the ethnic ban studies in Arizona is an example of how youth respond in order to relink with the histories coloniality aim to diminished through schooling (Mignolo, 2017). Their decolonial actions also push back against the deficit narratives Mexican American youth are frame in media and educational policies. Today, after almost 7 years of fighting the ban, the Ethic Studies program is back in Tucson schools' classrooms (Depenbrock, 2017)[8].

Other decolonial actions have aimed to end disciplinary practices that disproportionally target Black and Brown students, and students with dis/abilities in U.S. schools (Cramer, Gonzalez, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). That is the case of the Denver-based Padres y Jóvenes Unidos (Rogers, Mediratta, & Shah, 2012). With the purpose of reforming disciplinary practices that were leading to a surge in suspensions, expulsion and arrests in schools within the students of color body, Padre y Jóvenes Unidos joined forces with a national civil rights organization (Advancement Project). After examining their school district's data, they found (among other things) that "students of color were 70% more likely to be disciplined than their White peer for similar offenses" (Roger et. al., 2012, p. 58). With this data, they publicly pressured school and local authorities to enact a reform that resulted in new discipline policies and a compromise "to eliminate racial disparities in discipline and the

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[8] Depenbrock, J. (Reporter). (2017). Federal Judge Finds Racism Behind Arizona Law Banning Ethnic Studies []. In https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/22/545402866/federal-judge-finds-racism-behind-arizona-law-banning-ethnic-studies

opportunity to complete class work missed because suspension without penalty" (Roger et. al., 2012, p. 58). In other states (e.g. Mississippi) youths have used forms of civil disobedience to protest unjust and dehumanizing disciplinary policies in schools (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2006). The highly racialized system of mass incarceration and policing of people of color stem from the episteme of coloniality where people are organize in categories of human and sub human (Monzó & McLaren, 2014; Wynter, 2003). Therefore, the actions to end the school – to – prison complex are in order to end the proscription of the human status youth of color are subjected where coloniality is at its core (Wynter 2003).

Decolonial Pedagogy. While community groups resorted of decolonial actions across to demand educational change within institutional schooling (Warren, 2011), other communities organize themselves to build schools that respond to their political and social needs at a particular time and space. For instance, the freedom school movement in the Mississippi, U.S., came as a response to the voting suppression African American communities were experiencing during the 1950s. Another example is the case of Heart of the Earth School and the Red School House in the Twin Cities, Minnesota founded out of St. Paul American Indian Movement's (No author, 1976). These examples illustrate how the decolonial project remains outside of state – sanctioned school because the state – sanctioned school remains an important institution for the project of coloniality as a form of maintaining exploitative relations (Tarlau, 2013, 2014). At the same time, implementing the decolonial project in school could happen when large social movements with enough political power can take over public schools, or build their own. In these spaces, the political act of decoloniality from colonially marginalized communities (Rosa, 2014) became a "decolonial pedagogy" (Monzó & McLaren, 2014).

Monzó and McLaren (2014) describe "decolonial pedagogy" as an epistemological subalterity where critical educators recognized and remembered "the history of oppression that has resulted in new forms of knowing and seeing, an episteme of resistance resulting from the need for survival amidst poverty, alienation, war, anger, pain and humiliation" (p. 520). Whereas the authors' idea of decolonial pedagogy is important in understanding the material reality of the history of oppression, it still missing decoloniality's goal of "delink [from the coloniality] in order to re-exist" by "relinking with the legacies one wants to preserve in order to engage in *modes of existence*" that once were "histories disavowed, diminished and demonized in the narratives of Western modernity [i.e., modern discourses]" (Mignolo, 2017, p. 40-41). Ultimately, a decolonial pedagogy should engage in a civil and epistemic disobedience, but also should operate on pluri-versality and truth which makes re-existing something more than resisting (Mignolo, 2017). This means, a decolonial pedagogy cannot take place if the colonized, as a "racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space" (Mignolo, 2009) lead the efforts of their modes of existence by preserving/recovering their histories and knowledge.

Therefore, this decolonial pedagogy would take place by decolonizing schooling and the education process in participatory and actionable ways. This would happen once the educative process and pedagogical practice is led by those who want to re-link with histories and knowledges once disavowed by coloniality through schooling. Therefore, the political project of decoloniality should take place outside the institutional state – sanctioned schooling, or by taking over the public schools. Here lays both epistemic and civil disobedience of decoloniality. The implementation of pedagogical practices from community-based organizations and socio-political-cultural movements in traditional schools are countering the institutional pedagogical

practices. These practices are known to be in opposition with the historical ways school enacts local and state policies.

For instance, a trilingual Navajo-Spanish-English magnet school in Arizona, Puente de Hózhó (PdH), is providing to Native and non-Native students multilingual, multicultural education as an alternative to the English-only statute (Lee & McCarty, 2017). This statute "requires that English learners be instructed *solely in English*" (Lee & McCarty, 2017, p. 70, emphasis added). The countering pedagogical practices in PdH grow out of the historical marginalization Indigenous communities has endured, and from a larger Indigenous self-determination movement. While the pedagogical practices in PdH are characterize as Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy (CSRP), its goal of centering child's culture and language in the school itself (Fillerup as cited by Lee & McCarty, p. 72) exemplify how a decolonial pedagogy can take place within the traditional school system. At the same time, while "the school affirms the sovereignty of the Native American nation," "PdH community has managed to negotiate systemic constraints (e.g., high academic expectations)" (Lee & McCarty, 2017, p. 75). This shows the tensions in the process of implementing decolonial pedagogy and decolonizing schooling within the structures of traditional schooling. Furthermore, educators from Puente de Hózhó (PdH) "understand their work as countering the repressive, compulsory focus of colonial language policies" (i.e. English-only statute) (Lee & McCarty, 2017). The decolonial pedagogical practices enacted by PdH's educators allows them to reflect in their own schooling experience where their language was suppressed. The authors stressed that all five Diné teachers (Navajo teachers) in the study "experienced the forced severing of their heritage language" (p. 74) in their own schooling. Here, Diné educators are engaging in the epistemological subalterity of decolonial pedagogy by recognizing and remember "the history of oppression that has resulted

in new forms of knowing and seeing, an episteme of resistance resulting from the need for survival amidst poverty, alienation, war, anger, pain and humiliation" (Monzó & McLaren, 2014, p. 520).

In the Mexican state of Chiapas, the Indigenous communities took a different approach to liberate from educational policies impose by "actores ajenos" to the "realidad comunitaria" (Baronnet, 2011). After the "acuerdos de San Andrés" between the Mexican federal authorities and the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in 1996, schools in Indigenous communities should recognized and integrate their knowledges, cultures and ways of being, among other things. Five years later, a constitutional amendment recognizing and guaranteeing the Indigenous' right to self-determination and self-government ratified these accords. Nevertheless, the government did not comply with their part. Consequently, the EZLN decided to unilaterally enforce the "acuerdos de San Andrés" by creating Juntas de Buen Gobierno. Baronnet (2011) explain that it is through Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas (MAREZ) that Indigenous authorities stablished over 500 schools by an EZLN's group knowns as promotores de educación autónoma. According to Baronnet (2011), these efforts are related to the process of decolonizing the education which started since the acuerdos de San Andrés. It's important to noted that those accords were possible after EZLN started an arm political struggled with the Mexican authorities. Today, the school system is not legally recognized by authorities but is legitimate by the communities. Each escuela Zapatista have their autonomy where the active participation of the community, including children, is vital for the decolonial project (Baronnet, 2011; Núñez Patiño, 2013). The Mayans promotores teach in several Indigenous languages and are re-linking with their knowledges and ways of being. While escuelas Zapatistas prove the possibilities of self-manage a school with the support of a political movement, their

defiance to the state-sanctioned school model make impossible to received financial and technical support from the authorities (Baronett, 2011, p. 41). In addition, the author notes that even though the schools allow for a democratic participation from each community it is hard for them to recruit teachers from their communities is hard and the attrition is high.

These political acts of decolonizing Indigenous education in Chiapas and Arizona have their tensions and obstacles as any other political action. Nevertheless, their decision of re-link with their knowledges and cultural ways of being create in those schools "lugares epistémicos" (Mignolo, 2003). Is in these "*lugares*" where history, memory, pain, languages and knowledges (Mignolo, 2003) create an episteme of resistance through a decolonial pedagogy (Monzó & McLaren, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research project aimed to convey the story of how/why *el Caño's* community-based organization, G-8, Inc., initiated a collaboration with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico to stablish an innovated educational project with curriculum focused on community leadership and social transformation in an elementary school[9]. The active participation of *el Caño residents* in this process called for a methodological approach that honors and builds on their strengths and assets. Therefore, the epistemological stance that would be central to this project is that when working along a group of community based organization or particular communities involved in a social/environmental action, "outside" researchers should recognize that knowledge will be learned from *vivencias* (people's lived experiences) (Ortega y Gasset as cited in Wallerstein & Duran, 2008, p. 28). In other words, knowledge will not only be pursued through research (Patel, 2016), but also will be learned from *el Caño*'s *vivencias* as their actions toward the environmental restoration become another source of knowledge.

At the same time, and following a decolonial stance, it is imperative to move away from the colonial approach to research where the community is the "subject of study" by recognizing *el Caño's* residents as important contributing participants to the research as a whole (Freire as cited in Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). To this end, humanizing research as a methodological stance (Paris, 2011) will also inform the critical ethnographic work with *el Caño's* communities. This methodological stance aligns with the anti/decolonial stance of this project, in the sense of countering the dehumanizing project of coloniality. Moreover, the fact that *El Caño's*

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[9] The name of the school is Emilio del Toro y Cuebas. For now-on it will be referred to as *La Escuela*.

communities are fighting systems of inequalities and oppression this methodological stance became an ethical need as well for this research (Paris, 2011).

Therefore, community-based participatory research (CBR) will be the research approach for this project which aimed to benefit all parties involved through an equitable and collaborative partnership. At the moment this project started, the parties involved requested that the proposed research should not jeopardize the educational project which at that point in time, the community leadership were advocating for the implementation of the curriculum. Unfortunately, by the time the interviews with participants started the leadership decided to end the collaboration with Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) and move forward with their project as part of their organizing agenda. Hence, for the community leadership, this research project presented an opportunity to put on record the institutional hurdles they had to navigate to see their educational project been a reality. Especially, how the curriculum designed by the community was not fully implemented at *La Escuela* even though it was approved by the DEPR.

In the context of this project was important to recognize history of the foundation of *el Caño*'s communities and the struggle G-8, Inc. have been carrying out since 2002 for the completion of the dredge and the permanence of their communities. Hence, to honor *El Caño's* history, which is the core of this project, a sense of critical historicity (Bang et al., 2015) will be present in this methodology. This means to always recognize that *El Caño's* efforts to transform the learning environment in *La Escuela* (along with other initiatives for the completion of the environmental restoration project) "are not new – they are lived and felt part of life and have been across generations" (Bang et. al., 2015, p. 7). To this end, this project aimed to avoid the persistent orientation in educational research "that often want to sever the historicity that lives in [this kind of project]" (Bang et. al., 2015, p. 7) in order to better understand the problems face by

El Caño's communities and the history that produce them. To reiterate, however, *El Caño's* communities have been aware of these problems and have engaged in efforts to transform their communities and the oppressive institutional structures (e.g. schools) to created decolonial, just and sustainable futures (Bang et. al., 2015, p. 2).

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The principles from community-based participatory research (CBPR) guided the methodology and methods in this research. For starters, CBPR "is not a method but an orientation to research that emphasizes mutual respect and co learning between partners, individual and community capacity building, systems change, and balancing research and action (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008, p. 6). These principles are drawn from the tradition of CBPR in the community health field, which have shown to be "one of many viable approaches to the development of knowledge and action" (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998, p. 175). For Israel and colleagues, the way community is defined will determine how the principles are implemented. Following their recommendation, I start this this section by explaining how community is framed for the purpose of the proposed project. Then, a discussion of the principles of CBPR follow (Israel et. al., 2008).

Who is part of the community?

According to the principles of CBPR noted by Israel et. al. (2008), communities participating in research with a community-based approach should be acknowledged as a unit of identity. Nicolaidis and Raymaker (2015) explain how challenging can be defining a "community" in practice because no matter the identity makers (e.g. race, class) its members can share, communities are never monolithic. The plurality (or non-monolithic characteristics) of the communities is central for this project considering the historicity of *el Caño* as a place enriched

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by (im)migration. During the 1940's the local rural families migrated from different parts outside of the San Juan metro area attracted by the new industrial economy while starting the new settlement at the same time. Later, Dominican migrants started to reside in the communities across *el Caño*, and other parts of Puerto Rico during 1960's political turmoil in Dominican Republic, including the U.S. occupation of Santo Domingo (Duany, 2005). Thus, for the proposed research, community as a unit of identity revolves around *el Caño* (as geographically bounded) and the shared interest, and commitment to meeting the environmental restoration of the water channel (Steuart, 1993). The description of community included here is based in part on *el Caño's* history and their social-environmental struggle. Moreover, this description is based on the way community partners referred to *el Caño* as the eight communities grouped under the organizing lead by G-8, Inc. and the land trust *Fideicomiso de la Tierra*.

CBPR Principles

While Israel and her colleagues proposed nine principles, I presented the principles that better reflect the context, and the work from *el Caño*. To illustrate this, snapshots of *El Caño's* community organizing work are presented within the discussion of CBPR's principles.

Acknowledging the community as a unit of identity. In addition to what was discussed earlier, it is critical to stablish the forms of participation and representation of community members at the individual and/or collective level. For example, if the community member are representatives of a Community-based organizations [CBOs], it should be noted what is the connection between the CBOs and the community in which it works (Israel et. al., 2008, p. 53). This means that because of the plurality of the communities, CBOs should explicitly state what interest and commitments it shares with the community as a whole. To reiterate, both G-8, Inc. as "*la voz de todas las comunidades* [*del Caño*]/the voice of all *el Caño*'s communities" (EQ,

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Interview) and Enlace as the public corporation oversighting the restoration project, are committed to a just and sustainable environmental restoration that guarantee the permanence of the eight communities bordering the water channel.

Building on the strength and assets in the community. *El Caño's* assets and strengths are the foundation to engage in CBPR. Historically, residents of *El Caño* have shown how they have been *building on their strengths and resources* to transform their social and ecological realities through different initiatives that go beyond the dredge of *el Caño*. For instance, a land trust, *Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña*, was created in order to maintain the collective rights to the land where the eight communities exist today in order to guarantee the permanence of the eight communities bordering the water channel after the completion of *el Caño* restoration. This is an example of how this principle aligns with the context and the community participants' work in *el Caño*.

Facilitating a collaborative, and equitable partnership. The collaborative and equitable partnership principle allows (to the extent desire) participation of all parties in the research process (Israel et. al., 2008). Nevertheless, Israel and colleagues suggest to discuss how ready and able are partners to shared power. This might require "great attention to structure, process, and continuous reflection and adjustment" to the needs of the project, the community, and the individuals involved (Nicolaidis & Raymaker, 2015, p. 170). In short, "*all* partners must decide what it means to have 'collaborative, equitable partnership' and how to make that happen" (Israel et. al. 2008, p. 54, emphasis added).

For instance, in a meeting I had with *Enlace*'s representatives and participants of the educational project to present the proposal for a participatory research I was informed that even though a full participatory research is ideal, at that moment this kind of research would not be

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feasible because of the multiple projects community members are involved. However, they manifest the importance of reflecting in the process of the emergent collaboration with the DEPR that lead to the creation of the curriculum and have it documented through this kind of project. It was agreed that the residents and *Enlace*'s personnel would be available to collaborate in this project. This illustrate how this partnership is dictated by the community to the extent they see pertinent.

At this point, the relational power in this partnership is one where power is shared with the researcher. For the community, documenting how the G8-DEPR's collaboration emerge and evolve, and how the community leaders and residents participated in the curriculum design and deliberation, was the main purpose of this project.

As an "outside" researcher I had to adhere to the way community leaders decided to collaborate in this research. Personally, this was not the way I envisioned the research to took place as I wanted to work in a participatory way along the community leadership. This in itself represent a challenge to the framework guiding this methodology. Nevertheless, it was my moral responsibility to respect the way partners defined how they were going to collaborate (Israel et. al. 2008, p. 54). Furthermore, I would argue, that the fact that both Enlace and G-8 opened the door to me as an "outsider" to learn about their educational project by conducting interviews, analyzing documents, attended to meetings, and contacting participant showed their active collaboration in this project.

Fostering co-learning and capacity building among all partners. While the reciprocal relation around knowledge is important, "CBPR raises questions of by whom, about whom, and for what purpose this knowledge is defined" (p. 32). In the context of this project, it is clear I will benefit from this project to complete my dissertation. On the community side, this project will

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help to document how the school project came to happened and have benefited the movement as a whole. This is something that the main collaborators of this project stressed they wanted from the research project. While the G-8's leadership was the main collaborator and beneficiary of this research project, other participants including allies that participated in the curriculum design, were left out of this determination. Nevertheless, the commitment from the G-8 as an organization to support this project in terms of logistics and support was active and went beyond, I expected.

In terms of capacity building, I will benefit by engaging in community-based research. I hope that this approach can open the doors for a reflection about the participants' actions engaged during this process and the mechanism that lead to the school project. As mentioned before, *El Caño* as the community have shown through their history to have the capacity to engage in CBTA (bang et. al., 2017) with programs like the school project.

Balancing research and action for the mutual benefits of all partners. CBPR as a research orientation should lead to community improvement by the practical applications of its research in the community (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008, p. 37). For this purpose, Wallerstein and Duran (2008) suggest the use of Freirean methodologies to point "outside" researchers and communities to a dialogical process that facilitates the understanding of the social conditions/structure that constrain the community's development in order to promote change through praxis. In *el Caño*, this dialogical process has been part of most of the educational initiatives Proyecto Enlace has been leading. Also, the educational project designed by the community is inform by Freirean philosophy. Therefore, the use of a dialogical process in this project will not be foreign for the community.

CBR as the orientation for the proposed research is the best way to honor the work of *el Caño*. Moreover, CBR responds to the ethical imperative for the "outside" researchers (and the academia as a whole) to be responsible and accountable to the knowledge assets and needs of the community working with. This ethical imperative became urgent today in Puerto Rico, where *la Junta* (the Financial Oversight and Management Board appointed by U.S. Congress' act PROMESA during Obama's administration) is pushing for austerity measures in order to pay for an illegal debt the state government accumulated through the past decades. The proposed measures are in detriment of the education, health and safety services, workers' pensions, and the environment. These policies would worsen the living conditions of a population that is living below the so-called poverty line[10].All of this is happening without accountability and transparency because *la Junta's* members are the same people that manufactured the crisis along Hedge Funds to further exploit the colonial condition of Puerto Rico[11]. For this (and other reasons), being responsible and accountable as an "outside" researcher is an ethical imperative for this research.

Therefore, the nature of equal collaboration for the proposed project not only represents a de/anticolonial approach to research but also for Puerto Rico. Moreover, the critical grounding of CBPR provide by the Freirean dialogical method aligns with the community initiatives from Proyecto Enlace that happen to be grounded on Freirean approach.

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[10] For more about poverty in Puerto Rico see Colón Reyes, L. (2005). Pobreza en Puerto Rico: radiografía del Proyecto Americano. Editorial Luna; Colón Reyes, L. (2011). Sobrevivencia, Pobreza y Mantengo: la política asistencialista estadounidense en Puerto Rico. Ediciones Callejón.
[11] For more information about the complicity of La Junta members with Puerto Rico's debt read the Hedge Clippers reports in this issue: http://hedgeclippers.org/hedgepaper-no-61-the-golden-revolving-door/; http://hedgeclippers.org/pirates-of-the-caribbean-how-santanders-revolving-door-with-puerto-ricos-development-bank-exacerbated-a-fiscal-catastrophe-for-the-puerto-rican-people/

PARTNERS AND SETTING[12]

The propose research will take place in the water bank of *el Caño Martín Peña*, a water channel located in an urban area of San Juan, Puerto Rico. El Caño is a 3.75-mile water channel clogged by debris and human waste that has been accumulating because of the lack of sanitary infrastructure across the eight communities bordering the body of water. This result in continuous flooding during minor raining events with contaminated water affecting the well-being of *el Caño's* communities. Originally, *el Caño* was a navigable waterway that connected the San Juan Bay National Estuary in Puerto Rico.

As part of the efforts to better the communities' living conditions, the Puerto Rico Highway Department presented a plan to dredge *el Caño* to the eight communities. With the participation of more than 20,000 residents, a comprehensive development plan for land use was established for the area (Letts, 2010). In 2002, through Martin Pena Channel's Enlace Project Corporation Act the independent Enlace Corporation (Enlace) was created as part of the efforts to complete: a) ensure the dredge completion, b) implement the dredge's policy, c) guarantee the communities' tenancy to the land, and a sustainable and participatory socio-economic development. Enlace have been working along *el Caño's* community-based organizations (grouped in an incorporated organization named G-8 Inc.), NGO's, universities, and the private sector.

According to their website, G-8 Inc. is responsible for the legislation that empowers *el Caño's* residents to actively participate of the decision making in the corporation and to work towards the communities' permanence and tenancy of the land along the water channel. As a

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[12] In addition to the references cited in this section, the write up is based mostly from the following Caño's community grassroot organizations' websites: http://cano3punto7.org/nuevo/index-english.html; https://g8incpr.wordpress.com/

result of these efforts and several years of community struggle, the Government of Puerto Rico and Federal Agencies (e.g. EPA) have signed an agreement for the dredge completion based on social and environmental justice.

With the creation of Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust (CMP-CLT), the residents from the eight communities became the owners of the 200 acres of public land bordering the water channel (Letts, 2010; San Juan, 2014). The CMP-CLT is model of housing collective rights which has received numerous awards, more recently, the Rockefeller Foundation and Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. The CMP-CLT protect the community members from a potential gentrification process, guaranteeing them the right to enjoy the rehabilitation of *El Caño* that the projects envisioned (Letts, 2010; San Juan, 2014). At the same time, the restoration project will translate in the solution to residents' health problems that are caused by flooding and water contamination.

Una escuela para transformar

Community leaders and Enlace reached an agreement with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) in 2016 to make Emilio del Toro y Cuebas Elementary School (*La Escuela*) the first school in Puerto Rico with a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation. According to a news report, the DEPR and the community organizing group, G-8, selected the school for this purpose (Jover Tovar, 2016). *La Escuela*, which is serving 160 students from K-5th grade located in one of the eight communities bordering *El Caño*, was selected because its school personnel could support the curriculum implementation. This project not only stems from the informal educational initiatives, but also from the needs the community leaders understood the youth from *El Caño* were facing.

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Among those needs were the low literacy levels. In a radio program, former Enlace's Director of Civic Participation and Social Development, explained how children were finishing 6th grade without being able to read or write (CPTSPR, 2017). The educational situation of young people from El Caño, and the communities' continuous socio-economic marginalization, moved the community's leadership to reflect on how they could improve the schooling experience, and have more active participation in this process. Although the literacy levels were mentioned as one of the needs to be address, the main purpose of the curriculum is to have a school that were connected to the environmental and social movement that was happening in the communities. As a result, the community leadership engaged in the development of a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation.

Curriculum. After the community leaders from G-8 Inc. and the DEPR signed the agreement in 2016 (Jover Tovar, 2016), Enlace's personnel facilitate the work and round tables for the curriculum deliberation. Members of the G-8 Inc. group, Enlace's personnel, a teacher from the school that serve as liaison, collaborators from the UPR, among others, participated in this process. The main goal of this curriculum was to design a learning environment in which young people could develop the knowledge and skill to affect change in their community and society in general.

In these roundtables five major themes or *Pilares* (as name in the curriculum) were identified to build curriculum in leadership and social transformation. The *Pilares* are: *Comunidad* (Community), *Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights), *Justicia Social* (Social Justice), *Conciencia Crítica* (Critical Consciousness), *Transformación Social* (Social Transformation) and *Liderazgo* (Leadership).

Each *Pilar* have its own curriculum matrix for each grade from K-5th. In the matrixes, activities and pedagogical practices are included. The suggested activities range from project-based learning to singing and acting. This curriculum is for a subject course focus on leadership and social transformation, but at the same time it is expected to be integrated with other subjects' areas like science and social studies. While the environmental restoration project is central to the work of the eight communities bordering *El Caño*, the curriculum learning experiences revolve around the Freirean notion of emancipatory education.

The curriculum with an emancipatory framework allows for students to develop a critical consciousness to study the social realities and structures that marginalized their communities to later work on transforming them. At the same time, the curriculum aims to be child centered but in the sense of their experiences as member of *El Caño* communities. For G-8 leaders, this curriculum finally aligns the schooling experience with the "*filosofía comunitaria*" (community's philosophy). For one of the community leaders, this philosophy is about moving away of begging for help and build alliances with diverse sectors to transform the community (Colón Dávila, 2017).

POSITIONALITY

In this section, I follow Patel's (2016) idea of "answerability". In her book *Decolonizing Educational Research*, Patel (2016) proposes answerability as a way for those of us engaging in research "to articulate explicitly how their work speaks to, with, against other entities" (p. 73).

Furthermore, approaching positionality through answerability helps to reflect on "how our actions, research agendas, the knowledge we contribute, can undo coloniality" (Patel, 2016a, p. 73). For the author, "answerability means that we have responsibilities as speakers, listeners, and those responsibilities include stewardship of ideas and learning, ownership" (p. 74). To this

end, Patel (2016) proposes what she calls three sets of coordinates: a) answerable to learning, b) answerable to knowledge and c) answerable to context. These coordinates are "impermanently fixed but durable enough to afford better reckoning with the social, political, and material locations of [this] educational research" (p. 74). Therefore, by following answerability this positionality situates the work I facilitate as "*investigador*" in this project explicitly in relation to, with, and against of *El Caño* as collaborators. Moreover, I found in Patel's answerability a way to avoid what Fine and colleagues warn researchers about using reflexivity to further silence those whose experiences have been marginalized (Fine et al., 2003). Below, I follow Patel's answerability set of coordinates to address how the work proposed for this research is answerable to *El Caño's* school project and their community organizing work.

Answerable to Learning in *El Caño*

According to Patel, being answerable to learning is at the center educational research and "provides a place to more fully embody decolonial stances" (Patel, 2016., p. 75). Because schooling's colonizing role as an institution of society, Patel notes that learning is not synonymous with schooling. Therefore, by being answerable to learning, community-based learning collectives within historically marginalized communities are prioritized and recognized. This contrasts with how traditional educational research often overlooks community-based learning collectives by focusing on the same practices and policies in schooling responsible to marginalizing communities like *El Caño*. In a radio program where the school project was discussed, a community leader explained how in spite of been historically marginalized and stigmatized, *El Caño's* communities organized for over 16 years to identify and "*luchar*" to solved the issues that result from the socio-economic marginalization of "*el barrio.*" Her description captures how *El Caño*, as a community-based learning collective, is actively engage

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in a learning process that involve understanding what causes further marginalization in their communities and how they can pushback against those structure to better their living conditions through community-organizing.

Adopting an answerable to learning approach in this project represents a "re-configuration of relationality in the learning process" (Andreotti, 2011). My relationship with *El Caño* started (indirectly) when I was a school science teacher in a middle school in San Juan. During my teaching career, I was more concerned about teaching for the test than developing learning experiences that were connected to the students learning experiences outside the schools. The pressure to meet the shifting demands of high-stake accountability policies was one of the obstacles to develop more culturally sustained pedagogical practices (Paris, 2014) and make political and ideological connections with my teaching practices. Also, I belief the fact that I was actively engaged in a fundamentalist religious community influenced the way I prioritized "good behavior" over learning. As a result, I was not aware that some of the students I served were from *El Caño's* communities. Furthermore, I was unaware of their participation in Enlace's youth leadership program (LIJAC) and their active involvement in other Enlace's initiatives. Today, one of them is a community leader in *el Caño*.

By prioritizing "good behavior" I was moved to replicate the form of schooling I experienced. I asked my students to do the same I did as a student. Sit quietly, do your work and comply with teacher's expectations. I became *cómplice* (accomplice) of the colonial project in schools. This pedagogical approach resulted in missing the opportunity not only to connect school with students lived experiences but also to recognize the work from their community-based learning collective. These practices broaden the disconnection between communities and schooling and speaks to the pervasiveness of coloniality in our actions (Patel, 2016).

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My current critique about schooling is result of my recent graduate school experience, and my research experience around the G8-DEPR's collaboration. After learning about the needs and goals of social justice education, culturally sustain/relevant/revitalizing pedagogy and other asset-based pedagogies to counter the injustice in schooling, I have become more aware and reflexive about my past actions as a teacher and how to move forward to undo coloniality (Patel, 2016).

Answerable to Knowledge

The epistemological stance for this work is recognizing *El Caño's* communities *vivencias* as the source of knowledge. Being answerable to knowledge aligns with this stance as it aims to decenter the form of defining knowledge in the Western academia as something that came into existence only by discovery through research (Patel, 2015, p. 77). Patel (2016) adds that this "echo the colonial project of discovery" (p. 78). I agree with Patel, when she states how knowledge does not exist decontextualized form those who are trying to know. In the context of this project, *El Caño's* communities *vivencias* in the environmental movement have been the vehicles of knowledge. Let's go back to what the community leader describes about the actions of their community. She mentioned how *El Caño's* communities were not as any other communities. Rather, they are organized communities that are used to identify the needs of *el barrio* and to work to improve them. Here, the outside researcher is not discovering anything related to knowledge because the communities have come into being through community organizing and building power to change their reality.

El Caño's work has drawn attention from many researchers across multiple fields and academic institutions from Puerto Rico and the U.S. In my case, the relationship with *El Caño* as a researcher officially started through Enlace when I approached the Director of civic

participation and social development for another research I wanted to start during the Summer of 2016. Back then, I wanted to see how young activist were experiencing school science in relation to the work they were doing for *El Caño's* environmental restoration project. During that time, I met Jay. It was Jay who in some way clearly stated that my position within the community was of a researcher when walking to his house after lunch he introduced me to his sister: "*Este es Marcos. Un investigador*" (This is Marcos. A researcher).

Therefore, being the *investigador* and answerable to knowledge, in Patel's words, means seeing myself "as steward of […] productive and generative spaces that allow for finding knowledge. Although, Patel (2016) stresses, all knowledge and ways of knowing are subject to temporalities and sets of impermanence (p. 79). I was reminded of this during the first meeting with some of the *El Caño* and *Enlace's* community leaders. When I was discussing my original idea of doing participatory action research, I mentioned that we could develop a protocol to establish partnerships with other schools as a possible application from this work. The director looked at me and told me how that could be happen later as they are engage in other projects that could lead to that same objective. This example shows how I need to be a steward, a facilitator of spaces, already existing within *El Caño*, that allow for the community to continuing finding forms to identify and work on *el barrio's* needs.

Answerable to context

The work *El Caño's* communities have been carrying out over the past 16 years is one of social change. For Patel (2016) "projects of systemic social change cannot pursue knowledge with regards to the context they are trying to change" (p. 81). Historically, the communities from *El Caño* have experienced marginalization. The fact that these communities started as informal settlements in the mid-twentieth century and today (entering the mid-twentieth first century) they

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are still advocating for better living conditions speaks to how the state and society have treated *El Caño*. The constant flooding events that result in the overflow of contaminated waters put in peril the health of thousands of homes bordering *El Caño*.

During a graduate course in urban planification I attended at University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, I first heard about *El Caño's* environmental restoration project (ERP). The course's professor was a former member of Enlace's board, and he described the impact the ERP would have in the communities and the rest of the estuary's ecosystem. He explained how *El Caño's* dredge would restore the crystal waters that once flow from the San José and Corozo Lagoon and across *El Caño*. I was also impressed in how the residents in the communities bordering the water channel were actively participating in the decision process, to the extent of creating a land trust to ensure the permanence of the resident. By that time, the governmental administration was threatening the Enlace Corporation with budget cuts. Since then, *El Caño's* ERP has left a big impression as a community project that can teach us so much as a society and a country. Today, their work continues to teach me and the rest of us in Puerto Rico and the world.

Over a year after Hurricane María ravages Puerto Rico, everyone flying into Puerto Rico can see blue tarps in some of the homes across *El Caño's* communities as a prove of how slow recovery is here, in the colony. In spite of the slowly recovery, the communities and community organizing groups from *El Caño* continues to fight for the completion of the ERP.

After the hurricane, communities from *El Caño* have experienced school closure. The school closure policy have been in place by DEPR for last six years, with just 255 schools closed in 2017-2018 (Pérez Méndez, 2018). According to the Secretary of Education, Julia Keleher, she is just following the austerity measures imposed by *La Junta* (Pérez Méndez, 2018) while she

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will be earning $250,000.00 for her 3-year tenure as SOE. As a result, overcrowded schools rented trailers to accommodate students. Ironically, hundreds of trailers were needed to storage the bodies of those that died during/after María in the only governmental forensic institute. Eventually, all the bodies started to decay and there's not enough personnel to deal with this situation. *La Puerta*, a local artist group, eloquently painted the description of this dystopian reality in a mural with the following message: "*Todo se pudre en el vagón de la colonia*"/Everything rots in the colony's trailer. *El Caño's* organizing groups have been answerable to this the context, as other community organizing groups across the archipelago

Re-configuring relationality

I agree with Patel (2016) that there's "answerability in the roles we have with each other" (p. 74). For that reason, one of the goals of this positionality was to record my role while teaching in the state-sanctioned school system in relation to, with *El Caño*. At the same time, from a postcolonial perspective, there is an ethical imperative toward the Other grounded in the awareness of insufficiency and a "desire for relationality (through a pedagogy of "unconditional love" of the "who one is" rather than guilt and blame" (Andreotti, 2011, p. 180). From here, in order to shift the learning process, the teacher/researcher's ethical imperative is conditioned to "open the possibilities without attempting to coerce and not judge learners' provisional choices of existence." (Andreotti, 2011, p. 181). In her book, Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education, Andreotti (2011) suggests that these possibilities rest in the configuration of "self-worth" and "self-insufficiency". Andreotti (2011) located self-worth within "one's unique, non-predetermined and always partial contribution to a collectivity" and conceptualized "self-insufficiency (…) not as inadequacy, but as dependency on the uniqueness and indispensability of the Other" (p. 178). By drawing from postcolonial, feminist, indigenous and radical

constructivist theories, Andreotti draws attention to the possibilities of engaging in a more horizontal relationality. Citing Lorde, Andreotti (2011) notes that in horizontal relationality the sense of worth/insufficiency are inseparable and "derive from the metaphysical principles that locate the self/Other beyond reasoning" (Andreotti, 2011, p. 178).

In state-sanctioned schooling, horizontal relationalities became a challenge and also a counter-pedagogical practice to the performative and high-stake policies that dominate the current narrative of educational policies. Therefore, as a former teacher, I see answerability as an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities of shifting the learning process by reflecting in my insufficiency as part of the reconfiguration of relationality.

DATA AND STORIES SHARING

In her book *Decolonizing Educational Research*, Patel (2016) highlights how in educational research remains "an implicit dependency of the researcher needing the participant and her "data" for the researcher's personal professional interests" (p. 43). Drawing from Tuck and, Fals-Borda and Rahman, she explains that outside researchers are positioned simultaneously as the holders of expertise and saviors, perpetuating the monopoly of knowledge in settler colonial nations like the U.S. (Patel, 2016, pp. 43-44). Therefore, when "conducting research with, as opposed on, peoples, the complexities of power and what is knowable and should be known to researchers is productively opened to questioning and negotiation" (Patel, 2016, p. 44). In other words, if the research aims to work with people in order to "destabilize a rigid working definition of data as said by some people (participants) in some places (the field) recorded by other people (researchers)" (Patel, 2016, p. 37), the methods for data generation should be open to question and negotiation.

Moreover, the epistemological stance guiding this project that recognize *El Caño's* communities and their *vivencias* as the source of knowledge further aims to destabilize colonial notions of data in research. At the same time, as an outside researcher, I should be reflecting on and assessing the complexities of power in order to disclose my thoughts about interactions in equitable and forthrightly ways (Newkirk in Patel, 2016). This also includes my subjectivities and biases.

Interviews

Interviews of the people involved in the process of forming the G8-DEPR's collaboration and the curriculum design were the main source of data. This is because both of the events are central to this educational project. The collaborative agreement was signed in December 2016 and the curriculum design was completed by August 2017. Today, the school is no longer hosting the educational project as the G-8's leadership decided, in conversation with the community, to withdrew from the collaboration with DEPR.

Teacher and other school personnel were not part of the interviews at the request of the collaborators due to the status of the collaboration at the time this project started. Also, teachers did not participate as they were participating of a research in which collaborators from Puerto Rico are involved. Is important to reiterate, that community leaders have asked not to interview teachers because of the tensions between teachers and community that existed at the time of the dissertation project.

Considering the broad participation in this process, key players in this process were identified with the help of Enlace's project personnel in order to arrange the interviews. As such, four G-8's community leadership agreed to participate. Also, two Enlace's social workers (only one was interviewed), one teacher educator, and Enlace's civic participation director. The one-

on-one interviews were conducted in Spanish. In total, I conducted seven interviews (one for each participant). The collaborators and their role in the educational project are included in table 1.

The four G-8's community leaders were actively involved in the designing and establishing agreement with the DEPR, with the support of the social workers and the Enlace's director. The community leaders, Enlace's personnel and the teacher educator also participated in the curriculum design process and/or attended meetings related to the curriculum deliberation like the one mentioned above.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured, and the questions were informed by the analysis carried out on several documents that have been kept in Enlace's installations. However, the first part of the interview to community leaders and Enlace personnel was dedicated to learning how/when they joined the *el Caño*'s cause and community organizing work. The purpose of these questions was to understand the role Enlace played in the community organizing work and how long-time residents come together under the G-8, Inc. to advocate for the *el Caño*'s revitalization and the permanence of their communities. During the interview I also asked how the idea of the collaboration originate and what were the role they played in the educational project, including the curriculum design. In addition, the interview I queried on how the community leaders saw the linking of the work they have been carrying out for the environmental and social just transformation in their communities with the educational project. Also, how having a school with a focus of social transformation could help in the advance of their cause and the Puerto Rican society in general. As the interviewees shared details about their participation, follow up questions were asked about the interactions between the community leadership and the DEPR's administration, including the Secretary of Education.

Six interviews were face to face and one by phone. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, expect for one that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The spaces and places were the interviews were conducted were determined by the collaborators. Three of the interviews were conducted in public spaces choose by the collaborators. Other two were conducted in Proyecto Enlace's facilities and one was conducted at the G-8's headquarters.

Table 1

Participants and their role in the educational project

Collaborator	Who they are	Role during the Educational Project
AC	- Community Social Worker - Enlace's Former Director of Civic Participation and Social Development	- Facilitated the community organizing work in el Caño that lead to the G-8, Inc. foundation - Was part of the community leadership in the educational project
AM	- President Parada 27's community board & G-8's member - Former DEPR's Human Resources Official	- Was part of the community leadership in the educational project - Organized the parent component in the educational project
LC	- G-8's President - El Caño's 2nd generation resident	As part of G-8's leadership participate in the meetings with DEPR's leadership

Table 1 (cont'd)

EQ	• President Israel & Bitumul's community board • El Caño's 1st generation resident • G-8's founding member • Former DEPR's school staff	• Participated in multiple meetings with DEPR's leadership at different levels • Worked in the educational project since its beginning.
CF	• Founding member and former G-8's President • El Caño's longtime resident • Barrio Obrero's Community board President • Former DEPR's librarian	• Signed the G8-DEPR's collaborative agreement as G-8's President • Participated in multiple meetings with DEPR's leadership
MS	• Professor in Curriculum & Teacher Education • G-8's ally	• Along with her students facilitated the curriculum final design
MR	• Community Social Worker • Enlace's Community organizer	• Facilitated the curriculum design as part of the social workers' team • Also facilitated the coordination for the meeting between G-8, DEPR and collaborators

Artifacts

Considering that this is a past event, the information gathered during that time in artifacts is central to the analysis and understanding of how/why *el Caño* participated in the school specialization and curriculum design in leadership and social transformation. The artifacts facilitated by Enlace project included five meeting minutes from the curriculum design meetings and other meetings related to the school program specialization. The meeting minutes included the agreements in each meeting between the DEPR's administration and the G-8's leadership. Other minutes included the curriculum deliberation among the community leadership and other collaborators. These artifacts helped to see how different community members participated in the curriculum design and deliberation. As the outside researcher, I was only able to attend a meeting during the summer of 2017. Therefore, the meeting minutes were discussed during interviews with folks that were present.

Among the artifacts facilitated by Enlace there was a copy of the collaborative agreement signed in December 2016 by the G-8 and DEPR. This agreement, which was designed by the G-8's leadership and ratified by the community, included the educational philosophy guiding the educational project, how student, parents, and community leaders were supposed to participate in school's governance, among other aspect of school's matter.

Other types of artifacts collected include news media outlets that have had reported on *la Escuela*. It should be said that *el Caño* as a community and as a movement has received continuous national coverage as a result of their important work. The school specialization has received sort of the same media coverage as well. That said, digital media and other news media that have reported in the school were collected as well. The news media reports helped to understand how the community participation in the school specialization program was portrayed

at the local level within the educational policies. This media were three newspaper articles published in the main newspaper outlet in Puerto Rico.

Curriculum

The curriculum designed for the school program in leadership and social transformation is the result of the active and collective deliberation between *El Caño's* community members and other collaborators. Accordingly, the curriculum as a document comprise all the community's input and feedback of how/what children need to know in order to be leaders in their community to affect social change. After the completion of the curriculum, the document was sent to the DEPR for its final approval.

That being the case, curriculum materials were used for discussion with the key collaborators. The curriculum approval has been key for the implementation of the curriculum even though the school has been designated as the school of leadership and social transformation since August 2017.

The curriculum was comprised by five units for k-5th grades. The topics for each unit were *Comunidad, Derechos Humanos, Liderazgo, Conciencia Crítica* and *Transformación Social*. The curriculum is organized in fifteen curriculum matrixes which contained topics/subtopics, objectives and activities for each unit and grade level. The grade levels were organized as follow: a) kinder; b) 1st-3rd grade; C) 4th-5th grade. The curriculum was designed to be implemented as one specialized subject but with the idea of integrating the main topics across subject areas. The curriculum was designed by one of the collaborators (Dr. MS) along a group

of students as part of a graduate doctoral seminar in curriculum from the UPR-Río Piedras

Graduate Program in Curriculum and Instruction[13].

Table 2

Data and Stories' Sharing

	Sharing form	Date	Purpose
Curriculum	• Digital copies of the curriculum (draft version)	• In February 2019 a draft version of the curriculum worked by MS and her students was shared via email by Enlace's personnel.	The curriculum was not part of the analysis but it served as a reference to trace the community participation in the curriculum design. Also, it informed the interview questions.
Collaborative Agreement	• A copy of the signed collaborative agreement was facilitated by the Enlace	• In June 2019 Enlace gave me access to a binder that held the documentation of the educational work. Among the documents there was a copy of the collaborative agreement and details of the work done to establish the g8-DEPR's agreement	The document analysis of the collaborative agreement and meeting minutes were important to understand how the G8-DEPR's collaboration emerge and what purpose or goals the G-8's educational project was aiming for in the context of their
Meeting Minutes	• Copies of the minutes from educational project meetings of the community leadership • Copies of the minutes from G-DEPR's meetings		

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[13] The curriculum matrixes design for the educational project "*Escuela en Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*" was a collaborative effort between *Proyecto Enlace*, G-8, Inc., and University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras Campus, College of Education. Also, the following doctoral students from the *Currículo y Enseñanza en Teoría, Diseño y Evaluación Curricular* were part in this collaboration: Luz Betancourt Fuentes, Luis Collazo González, Rodolfo De Puzo Basanta, Marta Montañez Fernández y Sasha Montañez Correa. Their mentor was Dr. María Soledad. Any question related to the curriculum matrixes design can be send to: mariasoledad.martinez@upr.edu

Table 2 (cont'd)

Interviews	• Seven individual interviews to active participants in the educational project:
	   ○ Four G-8's leaders
	   ○ Two Enlace's Personnel
	   ○ One Collaborator
		• Six interviews were face-to-face and one by phone.
		• The interviews happened in a spam of one month approximately between October and November 2019
			• The series of interviews were informed by the document analysis.
			• The interviews helped to better understand the organizing history of El Caño's communities and the how the collaborative agreement was put together by the G-8's leadership.
			• The series of interviews also helped to learn about the tensions between the G-8 and DEPR during the implementation of the agreement.

DATA ANALYSIS

For the analysis of the stories shared by the collaborators I relied on decolonial theory. From a decolonial stance I was intentionally attentive for instances where the community leadership, building on their *apoderamiento comunitario*, were repositioning themselves as agents of change to transform public education in their neighborhood. The decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres, 2011) also allowed me to pay attention to occasions where the community were collectively recovering their *saberes* while building the collaboration and designing the curriculum as a form of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009). In short, a decolonial stance allowed me to foreground how the power relations are inscribed by the politics of colonial legacies and rethink about community organizing and community-school collaboration "in light of coloniality and the search of decolonization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242)

The interviews took place in Spanish. Also, the curriculum and the artifacts were written in Spanish. This mean that the analysis took place on Spanish transcriptions. While this dissertation is written in English, transcripts experts are presented in Spanish and English.

The themes identified during the analysis emerged from the language used by the participants as an analytical tool (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By language I mean the words collaborators use to describe and share the lived/life experiences during interviews, or other forms of expression, written or not. This analytical tool provided the opportunity to pay attention to the way participants contextualized the events that lead to educational project and the curriculum design. Also, it helped to understand the context in which their participation in the curriculum design took place. Look at the words or read the words from the collaborators means to read the world or context of their lived experiences. This particular reading took place on the transcriptions of the interviews. Some of the questions used in this process were: Why did they

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get involved in the school project? What knowledges did they bring to the deliberative process? How were deliberations shaped by power and relationalities? How important is having a school with a focus in leadership and social transformation? What is the historical relationship between *El Caño* and the school hosted by *El Caño*?

By using this analytical tool, there is the opportunity to use the words from the respondents as a code Corbin and Strauss (2008) call "in-vivo code" (p. 82). For this project, using the words of the participants is more than having using a "better term" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) for the analysis, but rather is a way of recognizing that the "code" came from participants lived experiences and knowledges. Having multiple perspectives of the phenomenon helped me to deduce the themes from the participants stories by comparing them and finding the similarities between them. I would argue, that the "data" in itself comprise participants' understanding of the problems they face and the history that produce them. Therefore, it was important to carry out this analysis with a sense of critical historicity (Bang et. al., 2015) of *El Caño's* history and the participants as residents and agents of transformation.

For the analysis of physical and digital artifacts, including the curriculum, I carried out a document analysis. This analysis, in combination with the rest of data analysis, served as a mean for triangulation in this project (Bowen, 2009). In addition, analysis of documents like the meeting minutes will serve to understand/see how the process of curriculum deliberation took place. As mentioned before, I was not able to participate in the curriculum design and deliberation, so the meeting minutes were an important source that provided context to the stories shared by collaborators. As Bowen (2009) notes, document analysis has its limitations as well. Among these limitations he identifies insufficient detail. Some of the limitations found in

the minute meetings were trying to capture everyone contributions without mentioning people's

non-verbal communications.

CHAPTER 4

PREFACE TO THE STORIES FROM *EL CAÑO*

The next two chapters present what I learned from the stories shared by the collaborators from a decolonial perspective. In chapter five I share a brief history of how the communities build the *apoderamiento comunitario*/community power to organize and transform *el Caño*'s environmental and social conditions. Then, in chapter six I discuss how the G8's leadership initiated the collaboration with the DEPR in response to the *educación pobre*/poor education in their communities by designing a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation, and how the community decided to withdraw from the collaboration as they saw DEPR using their centralized power to impede the implementation of the curriculum designed by the community. The main points driving the storyline in the coming two chapters are:

- The *apoderamiento comunitario* in *el Caño*'s communities promoted by Enlace and G-8's community organizing work became a decolonizing work that counters years of colonialism and coloniality that aim to erasure them from their land (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

- The G8's educational project was aiming to disrupt the historical colonial legacies embedded in deficit-school-based relationship with communities and families (Baquedano☐López et al., 2014).

- The centralized power and the *política partidista* in DEPR's colonial administration were important forces that jeopardized the G-8's educational project.

Bellow I delve into each of the point above and signal examples that can be found in the following chapters.

Building *Apoderamiento Comunitario*

To understand how the G8's leadership engaged in the educational project in leadership and social transformation, in chapter five I present how the eight communities build community power. The storyline presented situates the educational project for "*la Escuela en Liderazgo y transformación social*" in the history of G-8's intergenerational work toward *el dragado* and their right to stay in *su tierra*. This sense of historicity serves to foreground the local politics that have shaped the community organizing work that simultaneously transformed those politics through *apoderamiento comunitario* for the first time in the history of *el Caño*. In words of a resident, whose quote was preserved in a mural: … y *por primera vez los residentes fuimos actores de nuestro futuro/*for the first time we as residents became actors of our own future; the idea of being actors/actresses of this particular historical moment represents for community members an important step towards the transformation and preservation of their communities.

Before becoming "*actores de su propio futuro*" *el Caño*'s residents were subjected to the decisions made at the governmental level which continuously was threatening their permanence in their tierra. This top-down and centralized relationship with the historical communities of *el Caño* result in the disappearance of historical communities, like El Fanguito and Tokio, by way of so-call slum eradication policies. EQ, one of the community leaders and second-generation resident interviewed during this project, recounted how she lived "*ese atropello/*through that outrage"*,* and how "it marked" her. But the *sentido de pertenencia/*sense of belonging that grew from her father's words: *Esto es tuyo. No te dejes engañar/*This [land] is yours. Don't let them fool you" move her to defend the land of her ancestors, their *abuelos*. That same *sentido de pertenencia* was shared among the residents and community leaders in *el Caño* communities.

From a decolonial stance, this collective empowerment repositioned *el Caño*'s residents as agents of change, or as AC noted in interview, "*sujetos vivos*." Even greater, the project of decolonization strived for empowerment (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 14).

Hence, when in 2001 the Government of Puerto Rico assigned the environmental restoration of *Caño Martín Peña* water tidal channel to the Highway and Transportation Authority (ACT for the Spanish acronym), planner LR and social worker AC wanted to implement a participatory planning approach. This approach centered residents' voices in the planning deliberation process which "from an integral development standpoint, implies an open dialog and a civic duty in regards issues they are concern about." (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 160, my translation). AC further explained in an interviewed how in the participatory approach the residents are not "*objetos*" but "*sujetos activos, vivos y que la decisión final siempre es de ellos.*" By recognizing residents as "*sujetos activos, vivos/*active and living subjects" the final decision in regards their community were "*siempre de ellos/*always theirs" to make through a participatory planning approach that would revitalize their community.

The participatory planning approach was the first step for the community to participate in the revitalization process, but it was important for the communities to be "*organizada porque si no estaba organizada pues iban a tomar decisiones por ellos/* organized because if they were not organized, they would make decisions for them" (AC, Interview). Having the communities organized was key to ensure their active participation in the decision making and the starting point for a community participatory design of the developmental plan for *El Caño*'s District (Cotté Morales, 2012, p. 160). Simultaneously, the active participation in the decision process, allowed for the leadership to used their *saberes* by developing a *pensamiento crítico* (AC, Interview).

Building a Collaboration for *Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*

In chapter six, I present how the G8-DEPR's collaborative agreement was initiated by *el Caño*'s leadership as an effort to transform the *educación pobre/*poor and unequal education el Caño's young people were receiving. Based on their organizing work, the community leadership wanted to take action on the high rate of young people been pushed out of school and the youth illiteracy that results from this. The community leadership attributed this situation to: 1) teaching practices that were not responsive to the community; 2) the lack of a curriculum that respond to the *realidad del barrio*. For the G8's leadership "*educación tiene un rol fundamental/*education have a fundamental role" in promoting the economic and social wellbeing to empowered *el Caño*'s communities. Thus, it was time to bring change to school so both community and education could be change by their residents toward *el Caño*'s social and environmental transformation.

The efforts led by G-8's leadership in building the collaborative agreement drew from their experience during the participatory planning process in designing a just developmental plan for *el Caño*'s communities and the Freirean organizing approach. However, in contrast to the conditions created in Proyecto Enlace, their participation in building a collaboration to bring educational change passed by a centralized Department of Education who did not invite them, and which have implemented neoliberal policies in their communities including school closure policies. The G8's educational project aimed to disrupt the historical colonial legacies embedded in deficit-school-based DEPR's relationship with *le Caño*'s communities and families (Baquedano□López et al., 2014). In other words, it aimed to decolonized power relations in a

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centralized educational system that have served the colonial project since its inception in the Puerto Rican society.

As part of the educational project, the communities wanted to have a curriculum that simultaneously could improve the public educational experience *el Caño*'s children have had to navigate and have an innovated school program that would see promoting younger generation of community leaders. Based on their experiences working with Freire's methodology as part of the organizing work with *el Caño*'s residents, including children and youths, the community leadership wanted to bring those pedagogical practices to the educational community school project.

For AC and the community leadership that *currículo vivo* was the corner stone of their educational project as it would reflect *el Caño*'s needs and what the residents hope to see transform. Consistent with the Freirean approach, the community leadership and other collaborators put together the curriculum through an open participatory curriculum deliberation where *el Caño*'s residents, children and leadership could participate. As AC explained in an interview, the purpose of this participatory approach *el Caño*'s residents, collaborators and teachers as well, could bring their *saberes* to the table and contribute based on their experiences. In light of coloniality, it also opens the space for the *saberes* that circulate in *el Caño*'s communities and can be recover from the unsettling experiences with schooling and school (Baquedano-López, 2014, p). It also demonstrates how from the deliberation process itself the community was engaging in a decolonial act to design a curriculum that was aiming to disrupt power at the central and school level.

As Baquedano-López and colleagues noted by building on Frantz Fanon and Sandy Grande's work, decolonial actions by historical colonized communities towards knowledge

recovery does not goes unnoticed (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014, p. 18). Thus, I would argue that the example noted above is a decolonial act as they were unsettling DEPR's centralized power over what should be part of the curriculum and designing a *currículo vivo* that centers their *saberes* and lived experiences as a community.

Facing the *Política Partidista* and the Centralized DEPR Colonial Administration

As the decolonial work of the community leadership did not go unnoticed, the DEPR colonial administration resorted of the *política partidista* (partisanship) to further weakened the collaborative agreement with the community leadership by diminished the community educational work and positioning the school knowledge system on top of the curriculum and subjugating to a greater extent *el Caño*'s communities *saberes*. I argue that the centralized power and the política partidista in DEPR's colonial administration were important forces that jeopardized the G-8's educational project. Simultaneously, the lack of support at the school level also played a role in hindering the implementation of the curriculum after the program in leadership and social transformation was inaugurated.

The DEPR's actions were sending the message to the community that "*no nos aceptaban*" (LC, Interview) accusing that the agreement was signed with the past administration. In one meeting with the DEPR's administration of the Secretary of Education, Eligio Hernández, told the community '*yo les dije a ustedes desde el día que nos reunimos, se acuerda Sr. Cotté, que lo que empieza mal termina mal'* further referring to the educational work as a "proyecto natimuerto" (LC, Interview). The expression of "*natimuerto*" used by Secretary Eligio Hernández reminded me of Freire's description of the authoritarian practices in education. Freire (1998) stated that an "authoritarian is afraid of freedom, to eagerness, to uncertainty, to doubt and to dream, and he opt for immobilism" (My translation). He adds, "there's a lot of

necrophiliac in authoritarianism" (my translation). By referencing to the project as *natimuerto*, Secretary Hernández claimed "victory" over the community and letting them know that he was holding the authority while at the same time manifesting his necrophilia towards an education that is cemented in the non-life of coloniality.

SUMMARY

The community's collaborative agreement aimed to transform a traditional curriculum and a baking education approach in schools that have failed to assert young people rights to a high-quality education and access to literacy. From a decolonial standpoint the educational project was a reimagination of the public traditional school where community's *saberes* were repositioned to improve the education for *el Caño*'s young people. By repositioning their *saberes* to *transfomar la educación*, community leaders were also reimagining what knowledge should be in the curriculum and how that curriculum should be taught in order to bring a social transformation in *el Caño*. Based on their praxis *liberadora* as community leaders they noted that the pedagogical practices needed to be political and should aim for *pensamiento crítico* so el *Caño*'s young people became agents of change in their community and Puerto Rico.

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN *EL CAÑO*

In this chapter, I present the stories and *testimonios* from three long-time residents and members of *Grupo de las ocho comunidades del Caño Martín Peña, Inc.* (G-8) and former director of *Participación Ciudadana y Desarrollo Social* from *Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña* (Enlace) AC. The stories presented in this chapter are, what I respectfully understand to be key events to recognize how/why G-8's and Enlace embarked in a curriculum project for, in their words, "*la escuela que queremos*"/the school we want. Especially, how long-time residents from eight communities in *Caño Martín Peña* build community power thanks to the organizing work of community social workers from *Proyecto Enlace* in the context of what started as a state developmental project sponsored by the government of Puerto Rico. After hearing/reading their *vivencias* and following the epistemological stance guiding this project, the main takeaways I focus on this chapter are the following:

1) The participatory planning approach and the Freirean community organizing work adopted as part of the State developmental project foreground *el Caño* residents' voices and active participation while the residents became "*actores de su propio futuro*"

2) *El Cañ*o residents' "*sentido de pertenencia*" (sense of place) in relation to their communities and their *tierra* (land) where generations have been living, is central to the intergenerational community organizing work led by G-8 and Enlace.

The stories presented in this chapter are not in any form definitive accounts of how today's community organizing work came to be. Rather, in sharing these stories I sought to avoid the persistent orientation in educational research that often severs the historicity that lives in this

kind of project (Bang et al., 2015; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). Particularly, a sense of historicity helped me to situated the educational project for "*la Escuela en Liderazgo y transformación social*" in the history of *El Caño* residents' intergenerational work toward the social and environmental transformation of their communities and the G-8's struggle for *el dragado* and their right to stay in *su tierra*. At the same time, a sense of historicity serves to foreground the local politics that have shaped the community organizing work that simultaneously transformed those politics through *apoderamiento comunitario* for the first time in the history of *el Caño*. In words of a resident, which quote was preserved in a mural: … y *por primera vez los residentes fuimos actores de nuestro futuro/*for the first time we as residents became actors of our own future (Figure 1). The idea of being actors/actresses of this particular historical moment represents for community members an important step towards the transformation and preservation of their communities.

The stories that inform the analysis in this chapter come from the interviews I had the opportunity to conduct with G-8's leadership for this project. In addition, I included G-8's community's newspaper and literature around *El Caño*'s history. Through this chapter, I am relying on the Freirean approach used by Enlace's social workers to organize *El Caño*'s. For this purpose, this chapter is divided into two main sections. In what follows, EQ's *testimonio* foreground the community organizing work and how community leaders build power to *ser actores de su propio futuro*. Then, building on interviews done with long-time residents of *El Caño'*s communities I follow the discussion of the community organizing work that transformed Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña into community organizing project. Particularly, I discuss how a participatory planning methodology and Freirean approach used by a team of social workers opened the door for residents to actively participate in the decision-making

process of *El Caño*'s dredging project. Lastly, I present how *el Caño*'s communities have fought

to keep their *tierra* from a hostile real estate market through the creation of a land trust known as

Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña.

Figure 1.

Mural with the quote "...y por primera vez los residentes fuimos actores de nuestro propio futuro"

"*Y ASÍ ME FUI CONVIRTIENDO EN LO QUE HOY DÍA LE LLAMAN LÍDER COMUNITARIO:*" BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER

In this section I present the *testimonio* of long-time resident and community leader, EQ.

EQ's *testimonio* helps us to understand how the community organizing work around *el Caño*'s

environmental restoration project built on the residents' *sentido de pertenencia*/sense of place to

promote *apoderamiento comunitario*/community empowerment among community leaders.

Looking back when she started serving her community in 2001, EQ never thought that people would recognize her as a community leader. Born and raised in *Bitumul*, as a second generation member of one of *El Caño*'s eight communities she felt compelled to take action to help her "*gente*." After seeing how the government neglected her *barrio* of essential services like trash pick-up, EQ started serving her *gente* by joining the traditional political party's committees. The leaders from those committees have been known as *comisarios the barrio*. This form of community leadership has been historically tied with the political parties in power and it has been more a quid pro quo relationship instead of a participatory approach to community service.

EQ recounted in an interview how her role as community leader was subject to her work during the campaign of the preferred candidate (e.g. canvassing) in order to gain access to politicians with the hope that they would help her neighbors with issues related to housing, employment, among other needs. Once the candidate was in power, she asked the politician to help on issues affecting residents in her community. It was not long after she realized how these politicians were using "*el pobre para subir* (…) *y luego que están por allá se les trepan las chuletas y se olvidan*"/the poor to gain power and later drunk of power they forget (Interview). While she did not share the specifics, EQ stressed in her interview how the promises made by those she helped to get elected were sometimes not fulfilled. Now, as a community leader, she doesn't want to do anything with any politicians. She further explained in an interview:

> *Entonces empecé a trabajar más bien comunitario. Era mas o menos lo mismo. Yo que lo que hacía era agarrar ventaja del político que ganara que yo lo ayudara. Pero como después ellos se van poniendo como en contra y empezarte a negar cosas. [A]demás yo dije: yo voy a seguir trabajando con mi gente, como yo pueda y con lo que pueda ayudarlo. Y así he seguido. Ya mi labor es mas comunitaria, no tengo NADA que ver con política. Nada. Nada que ver con política. Y así me fui convirtiendo en lo que hoy día le llaman, líder, comunitario*/I started to do community work. Sort of. What I was doing was taking advantage of the politician I help to win. But because after you helped them they started to go against you and saying no to the help you asked for. I told to myself: I will keep working for *mi gente*, as I can with what I have to help them. And so, I have

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continued. My work is more for the community, I have nothing to do with politics. Nothing. Nothing to do with politics. And so, I became what they call you today, a leader, a community leader.

While EQ noted that her work as *comisario de barrio* was sort of the same as a community leader, she stressed how she decided to attend to the needs of her community without the help of those politicians she assisted to get elected. She understood that her work did not depend on a politician's favor but on her will to help her "*gente, como yo pueda y con lo que pueda ayudarlo/*people as far as I can with what I have." Her work in her community of *Bitumul* positioned her as a community leader, even before she became part of G-8, Inc.

EQ and other G-8's leaders noted how the organizing work led by LR , an urban planner, and AC, a social worker, built the collective power in *El* Caño's communities around *el dragado*. EQ recounted how by the time AC and other social workers from Enlace started to "*caminar las comunidades,*" that they found how most of the communities were organized or had certain forms of community leadership. EQ recounted in an interview:

> *Cuando llegan esta personas de,…Enlace. Que así era que se llamaba, Enlace, venían en representación de la Autoridad de Carreteras. Que era el [departamento de gobierno encargado del] proyecto que iba a pasar por esas comunidades. Y como esa gente [Carreteras] en lo que piensan es en varilla y cemento, ¡no piensan en mas ná!/* When they (AC and the team of social workers) arrived, they came representing the Highway Authority [which was the government agency in charge of the] project that would pass through our communities. And those people [Carreteras] have only reinforcing rods and concrete in mind. Nothing else!

As noted in chapter three, the long history of Puerto Rico's government policies to displace the working families living in *el Caño*'s margins have had residents wary of the projects sponsored by state agencies. EQ expression about the fact that the Highway Authority of thinking only in concrete and nothing else capture the inhuman practices that accompany state centralized projects where families are forcedly evicted and their home are expropriated to build projects, they will not enjoy. But EQ noted how this time was different:

Pero tuvimos la bendición, porque allá arriba hay un dios. Que quienes llegan acá, como Enlace fueron, AC, Miguel y, Lumary. Tres trabajadores sociales. Ellos comienzan a caminar las comunidades y se van percatando que son comunidades que la mayoría están, organizadas/ But we were blessed, because there's a god. That the ones to arrive here, representing Enlace, were AC, Miguel y Lumary (sic). Three social workers. They stared to walk the communities and they started to notice that most of the communities were organized.

For EQ this was a *bendición* to have this team of social workers empowering them and warning them about was coming to their communities. That was how EQ knew about the proposed project for *El Caño* and joined the organizing process as the representative of *Israel y Bitumul*.

During the meetings facilitated by social workers, EQ and other community leaders were informed AC and the community social workers from Enlace about *el dragado* and how it would affect their communities, which include potential evictions and communities displacement. It was during these meetings that EQ learned that communities as close as *Las Monjas* were dealing with the same situations with trash service and serious environmental issues (e.g. flooding) due to the clogged water channel as her community *Bitumul*. She detailed in an interview:

> *Ellos siguieron caminando las comunidades, buscando esas organizaciones que existían. Empezaron a reunirnos. Ahí empezamos nosotros a conocernos porque yo en mi comunidad no conocía, ni sabía que en Las Monjas había organización también. Entonces ahí ellos [Enlace] empezaron como a juntarnos y reunirnos, nos vamos conociendo, se hacía reuniones, hablábamos. Y como te expresé orita de lo que yo sentí cuando visité otros países, ahí yo decía: pero nosotros somos todos cercanos y tenemos los mismos problemas. Recogido de basura que no se da. Los mismos problemas tenemos.*/ They kept walking the communities, looking for those organizations that existed. They began to gather the community leaders. That's when we started to get to know each other because I didn't know in my community, nor did I know that in Las Monjas there was an organization as well. Then they [Enlace] began to get us together and meet us, we got to know each other, they held meetings, we talked. And as I told you earlier what I felt when I visited other countries, I said: but we are all close and we have the same problems. Picking up trash that doesn't happen. We have the same problems.

Before the team of social workers arrived to *el Caño*, community leaders were not aware of how other communities were organized. So, bringing together the community organizations and their leadership was critical to build power among *el Caño*'s residents.

EQ noted that after several meetings and focus groups the *Grupo de las ocho comunidades del Caño Martín Peña, Inc.* (G-8) was created to represent and be "*la voz de todas las comunidades/*be the voice of all communities." The idea of having one organization that brought together the leadership from the eight communities was a way to empower the historical marginalized communities and open the space to *El Caño*'s residents to actively participate in the decision making for the future project in their communities.

EQ's will to defend her community is informed by what her father taught her about having a "*sentido de pertenencia*"/sense of place with the lands in *El Caño.* After meeting with other community leaders, she learned that that was also the case for them.

> *Y mi papá por lo menos a nosotros (y por lo que he visto que comparto con muchos líderes) se nos enseñó lo que es tener sentido de pertenencia. Y aprendimos a querer estas tierras, que prácticamente podemos decir que nuestros antepasados, nuestros abuelos y demás las crearon porque no existían. Eran humedales…y ellos fueron rellenando, y rellenando, y construyendo y demás. Por eso ellos las crearon.*/My father, at least to us (and what I have learned it seem that other leaders as well) we were taught what is to have sense of belonging. And we learn to love these lands, that we can say that our ancestors, our grandfathers y others created them because there was no land. They were wetlands. And they filled [the wetlands], and filled [with dirt], and building over. That's how they created.

The *sentido de pertenencia* among *el Caño*'s residents, could be argued, is bounded by generational relationship to the land EQ and community leaders'*antepasados* created to build their homes and communities. The land, *la tierra*, created by EQ's *antepasados* became a place for eight communities and thousands of families living under marginalized conditions that resulted from the government neglect described in chapter three. Nevertheless, the residents were aware of the value the same state saw on their *tierras* to accommodate *grandes intereses*.

EQ recalled how since she was a kid she has always heard from her dad of the possibility

of forced evictions and how that *sentido de pertenencia* she grew up with moved her to defend

her community.

> *Papi nos decía, 'un día nos van a sacar' (...) Seguro de lo que estaba diciendo. 'Un día nos van a sacar'. Pero siempre me decía: 'Pero esto es tuyo. Esto es tuyo. No te dejes engañar. No te dejes que te engañen.' Y yo na ma' que lo oía. Pero ese 'esto es tuyo' me hace crear ese sentido de pertenencia. 'Esto es mío', y esto es mío y tú no me lo vas a quitar' ¡Esto es mío! ¿Cómo que tú me lo vas a quitar? ¡NO! Vamos a pelear los dos, porque eso es mío. Ves, así me crie.*/Daddy used to say, 'one day they will kick us out.' He was confident about that. 'one day they will kick us out.' But he always told me 'But this is yours. This is yours. Don't let anyone to fool you.' And I listen. But that 'this is yours' create a sense of belonging in me. This is mine! (grabbing her cell phone to illustrate) How come you would take it away from me? NO! I'll fight you, because this is mine. See, that's how I was raised up.

For EQ, her father's words "*esto es tuyo*" capture what her family and the communities have

built from generations as their place, *su tierra*. As describe in chapter three, like EQ's family,

residents resorted of inventive solutions to create that *tierra* and build their homes. Therefore, the

experience of *crear la tierra*, along with the affirmation of *esto es tuyo* strength a *sentido de*

pertenencia to fight for the permanence of their communities in *el Caño*.

For EQ, now the government's intentions to relocate the families and communities as part

of the proposed project for dredging *El Caño* were facing "[…] *un problema: hay organización*/a

problem: there are organizing groups" (Interview). The community organizing work led by

Enlace's social workers started a transformation of the agency's project as they were pushing

from within the State agency a participatory planning process for the community to be involved.

According to AC (Interview), this organizing work created an opportunity to build community

power across the eight communities. It was through that community power where residents

leverage the *sentido de pertenencia* to defend their permanence and revitalization of *el Caño* as

the place/land that EQ and other generations of residents have learned "*a querer*." AC further

explained in an interview how the organizing work also aimed to build a *apoderamiento comunitario*/community empowerment so residents became central in *el dragado* project.

However, this process of community organizing was long but residents finally came together to participate in the development of a plan to restore *el Caño*. At first, there was opposition from the agency's leadership, but as the community was building power through the community organizing process the State agency approved. From then on, and following their developmental plan, *el Caño*'s leadership has been able to actively create public policy towards the restoration of the water channel. The result was the creation of a public corporation by a law that the same residents created.

EQ's *testimonio* captured the ways in which for generations longtime residents have been building community power grounded in a *sentido de pertenencia* and *apoderamiento comunitario* through organizing work. This community power moved a group of inter/multi-generational residents from *el Caño* in coming together under one community organization, G-8, Inc., to ensure the permanence of the eight historical communities as a governmental state project was proposing an environmental restoration of the water channel.

ORGANIZING WORK TO TRANSFORM A GOVERNMENTAL PROJECT TO A SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY PROJECT

In this section, I discuss how the community organizing work started by AC and LR along *El Caño*'s communities back in 2003 transformed Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña into a community organizing project. I start by presenting the participatory planning approach proposed by Enlace's LR for the *el Caño*'s dredge project. Particularly, how this planning approach, aligned with a public policy on poverty, opened the door for long-time residents from historical communities to actively participate in the decision-making process of *el*

Caño's dredging project. Then, I explained how the Freirean approach used by AC and a team of social workers undergirded the community organizing work in *el Caño*'s communities. Particularly, how a participatory planning methodology and a Freirean approach used by a team of social workers helped to build community power among the residents of the eight communities. As a result, the communities were empowered and their voices centered in the decision-making process leading them, "*actores de su futuro/* became actors of their own future."

Sujetos vivos, no objetos: Adopting a Participatory Planning Approach

The adopted participatory planning approach opened the path for *El Caño*'s historical communities to actively participate in the deliberation and design of a just and sustainable development for Caño Martín Peña's District (Cotté Morales, 2012). In 2001, the Government of Puerto Rico assigned the environmental restoration of *Caño Martín Peña* water tidal channel to the Highway and Transportation Authority (ACT, Department's Spanish acronym). The then ACT's Secretary asked LR and AC to facilitate the process of relocation of the families within the communities bordering the water channel to leave way for the dredge. But LR and AC had a different approach to the way *el Caño*'s residents should participate in this process. According to Cotté Morales (2010), LR convinced the ACT to include the *el Caño*'s residents in the planning process from the beginning and to adopt a participatory planning methodology for *Proyecto Enlace* (p. 158).

The participatory planning approach "centers residents in the deliberation process; it gives them voice and, from an integral development standpoint, implies an open dialog and a civic duty in regards issues they are concern about." (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 160, my translation). In an interview AC further explained how in the participatory approach the residents are not "*objetos*" but "*sujetos activos, vivos y que la decisión final siempre es de ellos.*"

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Moreover, this participatory planning methodology changed the objectives of an engineering project by having the residents actively participating in the social and environmental project for the eight communities from *El Caño* (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 140).

From a decolonial stance, this represented a shift to the ontological and epistemological relations between a State colonial administration like the ACT and *el Caño*'s marginalized communities. Historically, the State attention to the communities was framed within a policy of "*mano dura*" which criminalize families for building their homes at margins of *el Caño*'s. Therefore, inviting community leaders to actively participate around the coming project show a radical shift in the way the State was planning to work with the communities. Specifically, the planning participatory approach was disrupting power relationship between a State agency proposing the project and the community residents affected by the said project. Also, it demonstrates how recognizing residents as "*sujetos activos, vivos/*active and living subjects*" where the final decision in regards their community are "*siempre de ellos/*always theirs" would set the tone of the participatory planning approach to revitalize their community would take place. In short, this new paradigm was recognizing the power and the right of *el Caño*'s residents to decide on matters that affect their communities and how that community power can affect change in the ways the communities have been historically marginalized. This in turn speak to the epistemic disobedience *el Caño* communities engaged from their geopolitical vantage point by interrogating whose knowledge count, whom this project will benefit and to what purpose.

The main strategy LR and AC used to compel the ACT to adopt the participatory approach was leveraging the policy on poverty from the then first female governor's administration (Sila M. Calderón), *Ley para el Desarrollo Socioeconómico de las Comunidades*

Especiales/Act for the Socioeconomic Development of Special Communities. AC further

explained in an interview:

> *Así que nosotros aprovechamos ese discurso del Estado para hacer un proceso*
> *verdadero de participación ciudadana. Digo discurso porque el Estado no esta*
> *preparado para hace un trabajo de base, salvo algunas excepciones, ¿no? Pues nosotros*
> *aprovechamos ese discurso de que esa era la política que logramos que la agencia (la*
> *Autoridad de Carreteras) entendiera que había que hacer un trabajo con las*
> *comunidades desde el principio. No al final. No darle una participación tradicional. Y*
> *fue parte de un proceso de forcejeo, verdad. Desde el punto de vista de lograr que*
> *entendieran que la comunidad debía participar desde el día uno.*/ So we take advantage
> of that discourse of the State to make a real process of citizen participation. I say
> "discourse" because the State is not prepared to do grassroots work, with a few
> exceptions, right? Well, we took advantage of the discourse that this was the policy that
> made the agency (the Highways Authority) understand that we had to work with the
> communities from the beginning. Not at the end. Not to give them a traditional
> involvement. And it was part of a process of wrestling, right. From the point of view of
> getting them to understand that the community had to be involved from day one.

While the policy made use of euphemism like *Comunidades Especiales* to refer to historically

marginalized communities, it recognized the resident as active agents of their own development.

Moreover, the *Comunidades Especiales* policy explicitly required government entities to ensure

communities participation in the decision-making process of projects that could be affecting their

development (Ley para el Desarrollo Socioeconómico de las Comunidades Especiales, 2001).

Even with this public policy mandate law, the ACT's authorities were not planning to follow this

policy as their plan was to communicate the details of the environmental project once the

development plan was completed and ready to be implemented. In other words, the ACT's

original plan was to execute their power as a State agency to impose an environmental project

that far from benefits the historical communities it could threaten their permanence with forced

expropriations and other mechanism of involuntary displacement.

Across the interviews that informed this project, community leaders highlighted how AC

and LR facilitated the process of community organizing as governmental employees by pushing

for a participatory planning approach from within the State environmental project to restore *El Caño*. The residents and leadership were grateful for this opportunity as they organized to fight for their right to stayed in the communities their ancestors established. In EQ's words: "*Tuvimos esa bendición que LR y el resto lograron cambiar el pensamiento al que era el secretario en aquel entonces allá de transportación. Y entonces todo comenzó a cambiar*/We were blessed that LR and the others were able to change the way of thinking of the then ACT's Secretary. And everything started to change." In an interview AC described how after a long process of "*forcejeo*" with the ACT's authorities, he and LR convinced the State agency in having *El Caño*'s communities to participate in the planning process from day one. AC explained: "*Logramos que la agencia entendiera que había que hacer un trabajo con las comunidades desde el principio. No al final. No darle una participación tradicional.*"

If look closely, it can be noted the Freirean approach in the disruption of formal rules guiding bureaucratic structures by centering residents' voices. As a result, there was an ideological confrontation between AC and LR with the higher ACT's hierarchy. Moreover, as a state agency the ACT had the record of being part of the historical evictions and the displacement of the other communities like Fanguito and Tokio. Simultaneously, the new approach was a democratizing sustainable planning process where residents could garner political power to counter housing policies that promote displacement (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019, p. 31). Thus, the participatory planning approach was challenging the dominant epistemologies that was informing the historical ACT's marginalizing and dehumanizing policies towards *el Caño*'s communities.

As a result, having the community participating as *sujetos vivos* in the planning process allowed for the creation of spaces where residents' voices were included in the design and

elaboration of a just and sustainable developmental plan for *El Caño*. In these spaces, residents

and 'experts' in the field of engineering and architecture, for example, engaged in *diálogos* about

what a new developmental plan for the historical marginalized communities would look like

when residents' experiences were at the center. I would argue that while these *diálogos* were

framed within the paradigm of participatory planning, the Freirean approach used by the social

workers as facilitators in these spaces dictated the norm of how to participate and to what ends in

a horizontal form. For instance, after 700 participatory activities organized by Enlace and G-8's

leadership in a span of two years, the new developmental plan or *Plan de Desarrollo Integral*

(PDI) was created in 2004. These activities included *asambleas comunitarias*, meetings between

the communties and governmental agencies, among others (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 165).

Community leader CF explained in an interview that the PDI "*están plasmado básicamente los*

trabajos que se van a hacer en cada una de las comunidades. Obviamente, la razón de ser de

todos estos trabajos son el dragado del Caño (sic) y lograr la permanencia de nuestras

comunidades/includes basically all the projects to be done in each community. Obviously, the

reason of being of all these projects is the Caño's dredging and the permanence of the

communities." The *trabajos* for the restoration of the water channel and the communities are a

result of *el Caño* residents' deliberation around how the project would benefit them while

guaranteeing their permanence. Central to that deliberation and design of the PDI are the lived

experiences and *saberes* from *el Caño*'s residents.

The creation of spaces where communities' *saberes* were centered during the *diálogos*

were crucial to empowered residents to be "*actores de su propio futuro*." As long time residents,

having the opportunity to actively participate in revitalization plan for *el Caño* was a historical

opportunity for to community members to design the future of their communities and secure their

permanence. From a decolonial point of view, residents' *saberes* were recovering the

knowledges that have circulated since the communities were founded. It was with their *saberes*

in *diálogo* with other *saberes*, they were aiming to transform and disrupt the colonial material

conditions that have historically subjugated their communities with lack of infrastructure and

economic marginalization.

The participatory planning methodology not only guided the community work of the

environmental project but it was also the starting point for the community organizing process.

For AC and the social workers, having the communities organized was key to ensure the active

participation in the decision making and the starting point for a community participatory design

of the developmental plan for *El Caño*'s District (Cotté Morales, 2012, p. 160). AC recounted

how he started to visit the communities as part of the community organizing work in order to

know the community leadership identified by the people to:

> *conocerlos y ahí dejarles saber que hay un proyecto que venía y que era importante que la gente estuviera organizada porque si no estaba organizada pues iban a tomar decisiones por ellos.*/ So I began to walk the communities, to see who the leaders were that the people identified, to get to know them and let them know that there was a project coming up and that it was important for the people to be organized because if they were not organized they would make decisions for them

Following the participatory approach, AC reached community leaders to start the community

organizing work by communicating to the residents of how important was to organize to

guaranteed their participation in the process. This message should have resonated to the residents

as most of them witnessed how other communities (e.g. Tokio) disappeared after been evicted

for other "revitalization" projects in the area and organized to defend the permanence of their

communities.

In an interview, AC noted different challenges he and the team of social workers faced in

the process of organizing the communities. The main challenge was *la desconfianza*/the lack of

trust among the residents towards the project, mainly because "*la gente desconfía y con razón, de todo aquel o aquella que se acerque a la comunidad: políticos, funcionarios*/people [in El Caño] are suspicious with fair reason from anyone coming to their communities: politicians, government workers" (AC, Interview) with unfulfilled promises. For example, AC recalled how part of the community leadership were frustrated after seeing how a government's initial planning process failed to fulfill the promise to communities to participate and not take into account the contributions of the community (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 162). This illustrate how the traditional planning process not only failed to revitalized *el Caño* communities' living conditions but also did not include the residents' active participation in the process. If carefully considered, the participatory planning approach was aiming to simultaneously give the community the power to have a genuine participation and to hold accountable the governmental agencies sponsoring *el Caño*'s dredge. In other words, the participatory planning approach was moving away from a traditional methodology that dehumanized residents by considering them as *sujetos vivos* and not *objetos*. Faced with this scenario, the social worker adopted a Freirean approach to organize the community grounded in the tenets of conscientization and faith in the community leadership.

In the following section, I elaborate more on how the Freirean approach used by the social workers laid the foundation to transform a State project into a community social and environmental project. Considering the Freirean approach used by Enlace's social workers to that end, I employ Freire's dialogical tenets of trust and critical thinking to illustrate the community organizing process in *El Caño*. Specifically, I included instances shared by AC and other community leaders during interviews that shows how the Freirean dialogical approach was key in organizing the eight communities.

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***Aquí habla la comunidad*: Building Community Power with a Freirean Approach**

As part of the community organizing work and through a Freirean approach, AC and the group of young social workers, promoted *espacios de reflexión* (Cotté, 2010) across the communities so residents could discuss, vote and organized to take action towards *el dragado* and the permanence of the historical communities (p. 162). These spaces were characterized by a participative democracy approach where residents choose community members that would represent them in the process of the decision making for the new developmental project. AC noted in an interview, how community leaders came to develop a *pensamiento crítico* through their participation in the process of community organizing. From a Freirean perspective, AC explained that when residents are actively participating in the decision process, the leadership started using their *saberes* by developing a *pensamiento crítico*. From the tradition of Freire's pedagogy, this *pensamiento crítico* is a result of people conscientization as they became fully aware of the structure and systems that are perpetuating the living conditions that are to be transform.

Social workers along the community leaders, worked to create "*asambleas comunitarias*" where residents chose their community board. According to AC the purpose of having the *asambleas comunitarias* organized by the same communities was to warrant that every community had a representation chose "*por su gente*/by their people" to participate in the meetings and decision making related to *el dragado* and its impact to their residents. Furthermore, the *asambleas comunitarias* became a space for residents to discuss the historical problems they have navigate from generations and what collective actions they could create to build a better future for the well-being of their communities. In other words, community leaders were developing a *pensamiento crítico* around the historical marginalization and government

neglect, and how important was to organized in order to take actions to transform those conditions. At the same time, it started to build community power among the residents to participate in the planning of the environmental restoration project and more important the trust on a project that as residents they would have a central role in its design and implementation.

Bringing together the eight communities was also an important step in the process of conscientization as most of the community leaders were not aware of the conditions their neighbors were facing due the deteriorated *Caño*. After organizing *asambleas comunitarias* and each community choose the leadership that would represent them, AC explained in interview how from there they started to "*invitar a todas las comunidades para que se conocieran*/ to invite all the communities to come together and know each other." In the opening vignette for this chapter, EQ recounted her experience during these meetings and *asambleas*. She added that after each community created their individual *juntas comunitarias* AC proposed the idea of bringing the eight organization into one. Consequently, the residents decided to create an independent collective representing the eight communities named, *Grupo de las Ochos Comunidades Aledañas al Caño Martín Peña, Inc.* (G-8). According to Cotté Morales (2010), through the mid-2002 the eight communities gathered in different meetings and activities to learn from each other, leading to the formation of the G-8, Inc. For AC, bringing the eight communities together was a result of:

> *una reflexión crítica [entre las comunidades] de evaluación de dónde estaban, qué querían, que los unía, que los desunía. Ellos entendían que era mas lo que los unía que los desunía y que para que este proyecto representara a la comunidad ellos tenían que estar unido. Y de ahí surgió el G-8./* a critical reflection [among the communities] of evaluation of where they were, what they wanted, what united them, what disunited them. They understood that it was more what united them that disunited them and that for this project to represent the community they had to be united. And that's how the G-8 was formed.

Since its foundation, G-8, Inc. has been the main group representing *El Caño*'s voices

advocating for the environmental restoration and better housing. This leadership have complete

independence from Enlace, and their membership see themselves as agents of change in their

community. This sense of empowerment is a result of the trust LR, AC and Enlace personnel had

on the community leadership that decided to be part of an *acompañamiento* process instead of

creating dependence on the leadership. From a Freire's perspective, having faith on the

leadership centers the experiential knowledge of "the people as active advocates for social

transformation" (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011, p. 1083). This faith led to a strong and

independent leadership that benefits from the capacitation facilitated by the social workers on

how to prepare a work plan for each community, talk to the press, but mostly from the group

reflections and education process that promoted a *pensamiento crítico*. In addition, community

leaders shared across the interviews how they came to develop a *pensamiento crítico* through

their participation in the process of community organizing.

AC further explained in interview how having eight communities organized under one

group could leverage more power when it comes to participate in the decision making and

meeting with the hierarchy of the State's ACT (e.g. ACT's Secretary). This is an example of how

the community participation went beyond the PDI's design. In interview, AC noted how this was

setting a precedent because "*No era yo [AC] que hablaba ni LR, era la comunidad la que estaba*

hablando/it was not me or LR, it was the community doing the talking" sending the message that

"*estas comunidaddes están unidas (…) esto es* poderoso." This precedent where the community

was "*la que estaba hablando*/doing the talking," was shifting the ways of citizen participation in

a state sponsored project where traditionally residents (in this case) would be put aside and had

to face the impact of the decisions made by others. With the guidance of the social workers, and

the support from AC and LR, the community represented by the G-8's leadership was the one to speak and reach agreements around the environmental restoration project with the State's agency on behalf *El Caño*'s communities.

According to Cotté Morales (2010), for almost a year the community social workers were only there to *acompañar* the residents in the community organizing process and bringing together the eight communities. The process of *acompañamiento* described by Cotté Morales (2010) was facilitated by graduate students from the Graduate School of Social Work at University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras Campus. This process involved facilitating community meetings with a participatory approach where the leadership had the opportunity to discussed and reflect on their current condition and how to transform it. From a Freirean perspective, the process of *acompañamiento* can be describe as a horizontal model where community social workers from Enlace facilitated the process of community organizing anchored in a strong sense of trust toward the community's capabilities of transforming their context with hope. This contrast sharply with the vertical model of power of State agencies like the ACT. At the same time, from a Freirean standpoint, this trust toward communities is sustained by the faith that should precede any form of collaboration or dialog with communities (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011). In words of Freire, there is no dialog if there is no faith in people's capacity of in changing their and creating a better world for them (Freire, 1970, pp. 90-91). As a result, the trust among the people will be the foundation for the dialogical process. *Diálogo* is for Freire that "encounter among human beings, mediated by the world, to pronounce the world" (p. 71).

The process of *acompañamiento* was also important to develop community empowerment (*apoderamiento comunitario*) among the residents and the community leadership.

This was consequential to the participatory approach of the project as social workers were sure that residents' voice was present and heard in the decision process at all levels of power.

In an interview, AC noted how in an environmental restoration project of such magnitude the community participation and community organizing became central for its design. Simultaneously, he highlighted that while the agency did not know about how important were the community *saberes* (knowledges) in the process design, the community was also not aware of the *poder* and *saber* they had by really participating in the betterment of their communities. Hence, it is noteworthy how the *acompañamiento* process was simultaneously disrupting where the knowledge is located.

> *No entienden que la gente tiene un saber, y a veces no respetan esos saberes porque hay unos prejuicios que todos cargamos. Y entonces, ¿cómo tú provocas procesos de participación real donde incluso la misma gente se sienta que tiene un poder y tiene un saber? O sea, hay una opresión internalizada hay gente que se creyó que no vale y no sabe."*/(The Highway Authority's leadership) don't understand that the people have a *saber*, and sometimes they don't show respect to those *saberes* because of the biases we all have. So, how do you facilitated a real participatory process where even the people can have a sense of power and know that their *saber* is important? What I mean is there's an internal oppression that led the people to believe they don't have value or no knowledge (AC, Interview)

AC was noting how the ACT perceived the community as an object without any knowledge or resources to contribute to the revitalization project. At the same time, for AC not only the agency's deficit perceptions toward the communities was a limiting factor for a real participation, but also the *opresión internalizada*/internalized oppression among *El Caño*'s residents was holding them to use their *poder* and *saberes*. In interview, AC noted how this form of oppression push people to think that experts' knowledge should not be questioned missing the opportunity to engage in a *diálogo de saberes.* For AC, the social workers *acompañamiento* was key to promote a real participation based on community empowerment where the residents could bring their knowledges to the table. This mean that it was important that during the process of

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acompañamiento the community leaders could feel empowered to talk to the ACT authorities or

other government official about what they understood was better for their community.

In connection with a decolonial perspective, the *acompañamiento* approach was

simultaneously countering the ACT's deficit perspectives towards *el Caño*'s communities and

affirming residents' *poderes* and *saberes* by repositioning them as *sujetos vivos*. Moreover, the

acompañamiento approach was engaging in decolonial work by shifting the location of

knowledge from ACT's central office to the residents through the *diálogo de saberes*.

For Freire, *diálogo* is the starting point toward *una educación problematizadora* where

all dialogical participants became critical investigator of the material realities of structural

oppressions, we live in. Central to the *diálogo* are the dimensions of *acción* and *reflexión* which

"unbreakable union" makes the word real to transform the world (Freire, p. 70). In this case,

when community leaders engaged in a process of *acción-reflexión* across the *diálogos*, residents

started to critically analyze the causes of the unjust socioeconomic conditions that have led to the

degradation of *El Caño* and how to transform them. For example, AC and the community social

workers that were *acompañando* the community leadership, facilitate these *diálogos* to ensure

communities' voices were heard and take into account.

> *Y tiende a creer en que el poder del recurso, ese profesional, limita a la gente a hablar. Entonces, ¿cómo tú cuidas el proceso? Facilitando, de que el profesional, arquitecto, planificador u otro, no domine el tema. No influya sobre la gente.*/ They tend to believe that the power from the professional, limits the people to talk. Then, how do you take care of that process? By facilitating that the professional, the architect, the planner or other, don't dominate the discussion.

As an example of how the community social workers facilitated the *diálogo de saberes*, AC

mentioned that when a resident asked a particular expert about a possible solution for the

communities the social worker would make sure the expert constrain themselves of giving an

answer and encourage the residents to present a solution. This also exemplify how the social

workers ensure the trust developed within the leadership was not mined during these *diálogos*. This also was extended by Enlace and G-8 by adopting a policy that requires contractors to take into account the participation of *El Caño*'s communities in any matter that could involve decision making. For example, AC explained how after the participatory design of the PDI "*la gente hizo política pública*/the people create public policy" through the creation of *Ley* 489. As mentioned above, this law would assure that the work done by the community around the way the project would impact them would not be change every four years. As EQ noted, this law was a result of *díalogo de saberes* between the community and *profesionales* from different fields. A practice that was also implemented during the PDI design.

As it was noted across interviews with the community leadership, bringing together the communities allowed most of the community leadership to meet for the first time and learn from the neighboring communities through *reflexión crítica* how they were all experiencing the same social and environmental problems due to the lack of infrastructure. At the same time, this *reflexión crítica* respond to the Freirean approach adopted by AC and the team of community social workers to organize the eight communities. So being together and have the opportunity to engage in a *relfexión crítica* about their living conditions and how they were affected lead them to take action and organize the eight communities in one organization. Moreover, the residents from the eight *el Caño*'s communities were building collective community power.

"*LA TIERRA ES NUESTRA:*" LAND RECOVERY AND SELF DETERMINATION

As indicated in context historical section, *el Caño*'s communities have been enduring the menace of displacement and expropriation as a result of the historical socio-economic political conditions framed by a politics of coloniality. In his "*Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and*

Decoloniality," Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) explains in "*Thesis Four*" how coloniality, like colonialism "involves the expropriation of land and resources" (p. 17). He further explains, that as opposed to traditional colonialism where expropriation is mediated by the "conquest of one group over another, under modernity/coloniality expropriation happens also through the logic of the market and of modern state-nations" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 17). Is within this context, that for generations *el Caño*'s residents have lived with the threat "*que los iban a sacar*" (EQ, Interview). Therefore, by enunciating "*la tierra es nuestra*"/the land is ours, *el Caño*'s residents are countering intentions of coloniality to leave them "without land, people without resources, and subjects without the capacity for autonomy and self-determination whose constant desire is to be other than themselves" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 17). In this respect, fighting to ensure the permanence of their communities in the lands of *el Caño* became a decolonial work.

As a community organization participating in the planning and developmental process for *El Caño*'s communities, the G-8's explicitly stated that its main purpose is to "*garantizar la permanencia de nuestras comunidades, ante los procesos de realojo propouestos en el Plan de Desarrollo Integral del Distrito de Planificación Especial del Caño Martín Peña (PDI)*/guarantee the permanence of our communities in face of the relocation process proposed for the PDI" (Enlace, 2007, p. S3). The permanence of their communities became an imperative to their community organizing work as the proposed environmental project could jeopardized what for many generations the communities had endured to maintain their right to the land they live on.

In an interview, CF explained how she came to the conclusion that "*el gobierno no…venía a las comunidades e invertía lo que tiene que invertir en las comunidades con el*

propósito que nos cansáramos y nos fuéramos/ the government did not invest in the development of *El* Caño's communities because they wanted to us to get tired and leave our communities."

The government neglect noted by Carmen came from her experience as a long-time resident that has seen how *el Caño* have deteriorated and the flooding events has exacerbated through the years. This systematic government neglect towards *el Caño* is grounded in the historical "discourse of the political and economic elites [that] discredits [and criminalized] informal settlements and reinforces-not reduce-the vulnerability" (Algoed & Hernández Torrales, 2019. p.40) of the residents furthering marginalizing the communities. At the same time, the political and economic elites saw the government neglect as a subterfuge to expose *el Caño*'s "privileged locations to the hostile real estate market that might lead to displacement" (Algoed & Hernádez Torrales, 2019, p. 31). Carmen further explained that she came to that understanding after joining the community organizing work to fight those same "*grandes intereses*"/powerful elites which are undergirded by the logic of the hostile real estate market.

EQ stressed in an interview how *El Caño*'s residents "*han estado luchando siempre*/has been always fighting" against the *grandes intereses* intentions of appropriating their lands, "*nuestras tierras*." Here, *el Caño*'s working communities *lucha* against *grandes intereses* revolve around the land rescued by generations of long-time residents. Land that did not exist before the rural workers started to migrate and settle in the wetlands of *el Caño*. In an interview, EQ remembered how she helped her community to lay the ground to build their home. It is this land that today is the center of contestation where *grandes intereses* use their political influences to grab power and push for policies that endanger the communities' permanence. But the collective *sentido de pertenencia*/sense of place among the G-8's leadership towards the land of

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their *ancestros* and *abuelos*, have been part of their community power to fight back the *grandes intereses* that have been benefited by the "slum eradication" policies.

In an interview, EQ describes how she witnessed the policy of "*erradicación de arrabales*" that forced the relocation of the families of Tokio (a historical working community near to *El Caño*):

> "*Yo viví ese atropello. Porque yo no vivía en Tokio, pero visitaba(sic). Y recuerdo, nunca se me olvida, eso me marcó*/I lived through that outrage. I didn't live in Tokio, but I visited frequently. And I remembered, I will never forget, it marked me."

She noted how she was affected when her neighbor told her with a heavy heart about the ways San Juan's municipality was handling the displacement of Tokio's families from their communities. EQ said how she felt "*ese sentimiento*/that feeling" from her neighbor and how "*quedó marcada*/she was affected." Like EQ, residents across *el Caño*'s communities have also been marked by the fate of Tokio's families, and also Fanguito, moving the communities to organize and fight for their right to remain in their communities and land. According to EQ, on the lands where *Tokio*'s families experienced the *atropello* of being displaced today there are upper class walk-up apartments "*que valen un ojo y parte del otro*" (EQ, Interview), government's building like the Electoral Commission, Puerto Rico's Coliseum, along the banking center of *Milla de Oro*.

What in the past was looked as unfitted lands to human life, is now viewed as *un área de mucho privilegio* by the real estate market. EQ explained that while the government did not intervene in the past to solve the housing problem in the working communities, now they wanted to intervene in favor of "*grandes intereses*":

> *El gobierno no intervino. No intervino para favor de ellos. Hoy en día quieren intervenir, pero a favor del mismo gobierno de los grandes intereses y sacarnos a nosotros. Hoy en día todo eso que nuestros antepasados crearon hoy en día sirve, y es bueno. Estamos en un área de mucho privilegio. Nosotros somos el corazón de San Juan./*The government

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didn't intervene. It didn't intervene on their behalf. Today they want to intervene, but in favor of the same government of the big interests and take us out. Today everything that our ancestors created today serves and is good. We are in a very privileged area. We are the heart of San Juan.

EQ and the community leaders are aware of the value of their lands and also, they are aware of the economic and political powers behind the government intentions to now pay attention to the lands of their *abuelos*. It is like the ghost of the eradication policy seems to loom over *el Caño*'s communities

The historical decolonial work for the permanence of *el Caño*'s communities have taken two fronts. In one hand, the government neglect to the communities' lack of infrastructure to systematically push the residents out their lands. On the other hand, fighting against the *grandes intereses* that have benefited from the land expropriation through the eradication policies in the past. Nevertheless, both operates under the logics of the colonial logics of the market (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Considering the *thesis four* from Maldonado-Torres (2016) by expropriating their land, the government was attempting against their *sentido de pertenencia* which has been fundamental to build community power among the residents from the eight communities.

In an interview, LC, current G-8's President and resident from Barrio Obrero San Ciprián, further explained how this abandonment is based on socioeconomic discrimination as other upper class residential areas near to *el Caño* have had the dredge done:

> *Si tu te fijas el Caño Martín Peña (CMP) discurre desde la Laguna San José hasta parte de la bahía de San Juan, y hay un lado del CMP que dragaron pero esta [parte del] Caño no lo han dragado. Entonces, siempre dragan para allá y limpian porque es el área del Condado y ves el show. Pero se olvidan de la gente que vive aquí. Entonces tu ves el discrimen, pero un discrimen, yo creo que no sé si ha conciencia porque tu estás perdiendo explotar otra área mas. ¿Entonces que pasa? Entonces tu sientes la opresión de ¿por qué no quieren dragar el CMP? ¿por qué los fondos CDBG vienen y no quieren que sean pal Caño? Porque, claro, les convienen que nosotros nos salgamos para poder ellos poner la gente que ellos entienden que tienen un valor adquisitivo mayor y que*

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tengan unos beneficios./If you look, CMP runs from San José lagoon until part of the San Juan Bay area, and there's a section of the CMP that was dredged but this part not. Then, they always are dredging that way and clean because is the Condado [exclusive] area and you see the show. But they forget of the people living here. And you see the discrimination, but a discrimination, I don't know if its unconsciously because they are missing the opportunity of improving another area. So then what? You feel the oppression of, why they don't want to dredge CMP? Why the CDBG funds are not available for el Caño? Because, of course, it's better for them for us to get tired and leave so they can bring the people they understand have more wealth to get more benefits.

LC was referring to how local and federal governments has systematically denied the funds for the restoration of *el Caño*. For instance, as part of the recovery funds assigned to U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (which is the federal agency to oversee dams, canal and flood protection in the U.S and their territories) in 2018 after Hurricane María, the federal government did not include the USD $215M environmental project (Algoed & Hernádez Torrales, 2019, p. 38). At the local level, and also under recovery funds, the government of Puerto Rico presented a plan to to invest the first $8.3B of $20B in Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) in "promoting displacement" of marginalized communities vulnerable to flooding like *el Caño* instead of investing in the dredge of the water channel to mitigate the flooding events (Algoed & Hernádez Torrales, 2019, p. 38). This happened to *el Caño* while developmental projects in exclusive coastal communities in Condado continued violating the land-water delimitations in times where the sea level are rising due to climate change. This situation clearly exemplify the discriminatory practices by the political powers in the colonial administration towards the communities in *el Caño* fueled by the economic power elites that are waiting on the communities fatigue to grab their land.

When asked on what she thinks could be the reason for the discrimination she referred to, LC explained further by making explicit reference to the land speculators and their relationship with the local political parties:

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Pues yo creo que es por intereses…tienen que haber unos desarrolladores aquí tratando de poner ojo. Son estos desarrolladores que aportan a los candidatos para sus campañas políticas. Entendemos que eso tiene que ser. Gente de alto poder adquisitivo que se están metiendo por otras aguas. "Yo te doy tanto si tú me das tanto"¿Entiendes? Entendemos nosotros que es ese proceso/Well, I think it's out of interest... there must be some developers here trying to keep an eye on it. It's these developers who contribute to their political campaigns. We understand that has to be. People with high purchasing power who are getting into other waters. "I give you so much if you give me so much." You know what I mean? We understand what that process is.

For LC, the *desarrolladores* access to power through the financing of political campaigns are pushing for *el Caño* communities' displacement in order to develop affluent projects. Take for example what happened to the lands once occupied by the working communities of *Tokio*. This is a clear example of how the *doble vara* used by different colonial administrations have been historically discriminating against the working communities while the real estate developers benefit from the "slum eradication" policies for their upper-class real estate projects. As EQ noted in interview, for residents the government would displace the communities in favor of "*grandes intereses*."

For LC and the G-8's leadership, it is clear that the government is also using a "*doble vara*/double standard" when it comes to allocate funds "*para beneficiar a los residentes*/for residents' benefit" and move forward *el dragado*. LC mentioned as an example the recent federal Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds received by the local administration after Hurricanes Irma and María. Until February, 2020 the G-8 was still asking governor Wanda Vázquez to release the funds for *el Caño'*s houses restoration (News, 2020). For her this is a form of *opresión* toward *el Caño*'s residents.

With the local political background and the discriminatory policies described above, *el Caño*'s residents along the Enlace's personnel reflected during the *asambleas comunitarias* on the importance of having an institutional structure to guarantee the implementation for the

projects included in the PDI (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 169). The participatory planning approach

gave the community the opportunity to engage in the creation of a public policy that addressed

the residents' concerns expressed during the *asambleas*. Furthermore, by establishing a *política*

pública from the communities they were collectively responding to what multiple generations

have experienced from the government neglect and marginalization towards their communities.

> *Si la política pública la estableció la comunidad y se creo un proyecto de ley. Después de [la designación del] Distrito de Planificación, se creó un plan (PDI) que fue a la Junta de Planificación y se aprobó. Fue a vistas públicas y se aprobó. Después se creó un proyecto de ley. O sea, la gente hizo política pública. A la par que estás haciendo un proceso de organización comunitaria también creas política pública que asegure que cada cuatro años cuando ganen los rojos o los azules (...) no cambien una política de trabajo.*/ The public policy was established by the community and a bill was created. After [the designation of the] Planning District, a plan (PDI) was created that went to the Planning Board and was approved. It went to public hearings and was approved. Then a bill was created. That is, the people made public policy. At the same time that you are doing a community organizing process you also create public policy that ensures that every four years when the Reds or the Blues win (...) they don't change the policy.

In other words, for the G-8 leadership participating in the design of the PDI was not enough, they

needed to lay a legal ground that would see the plan executed independently of the local politics.

According to Cotté Morales (2010), this resulted in the legislation of Act 489: *Ley para el*

Desarrollo del Distrito de Planificación Especial de las Comunidades del Caño Marín Peña. In

an interview AC noted that this law was a result at the same time of the community organizing

work. That's how, along legal advisors and other collaborators, the G-8's leadership were sure to

addressed the concern expressed during the *asambleas comunitarias*. EQ noted in interview how

important is this law for the community:

> *Para reafirmarnos en lo de nosotros, en lo que realmente queríamos y estábamos buscando, con la ayuda de muchos profesionales se crea la ley 489 del 24 de septiembre de 2004. Pues a través de esa ley nosotros logramos crear la Corporación Pública del Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña. Se crea con esa ley (inteligible) necesitábamos tener un agarre, algo, y la creamos.*/ In order to reassert our work, and in what we really wanted and were looking for, with the help of many professionals, Law 489 of September 24, 2004 was created. Through this law we were able to create the Public

Corporation of the Martín Peña Enlace Project. It was created with that law (intelligible) we needed to have a leverage, something, and we created it.

For EQ and the community leadership, having participated in the creation of a law that was responsive to what residents "*realmente queríamos y estabamos buscando*" was giving them power to address the concerns gathered in the PDI through the *asambleas comunitarias*. Furthermore, AC explained in interview how this law was creating an institutional tool to assure the completion of *el dragado* and more importantly, communities' permanence in *el Caño*. This also demonstrate the degree of *apoderamiento comunitario* G-8's community leadership have developed and its capacity to develop public policy for their community's well-being.

The creation of a corporation would give independence to Enlace from the ACT to continuing the work that started with the community. With a 20 years limit to operate, and another five to be extended, the *Corporación* would make sure that the project included in the PDI can be completed. The board of directors is constituted by 13 members with six of those being *El Caño*'s residents, and the rest would represent the state and municipal administration. Nevertheless, those candidates would be nominated by G-8, Inc. As EQ said: "*porque no nos van a mandar tampoco los que a ellos le de la gana*/because they won't send whoever they want." Here EQ was noting how their previous experiences with politicians from both parties had made them wary of the way politicians use these positions to appointed people align with interests outside the community. Therefore, as *el Caño*'s voice the G-8 was making sure to exercise their community power at all levels.

In addition to the creation of the corporation, the article 16 of Act 489, create *Fideicomiso de la tierra*. Their land trust enjoys of the recognition at the international level, including the UN-Habitat Award. For CF, *el Fideicomiso* is important for the permanence of the communities.

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Gracias a los aliados y el proyecto Enlace, hemos logrado escoger esta herramienta que es el fideicomiso de la tierra. El fideicomiso de la tierra nos da un poquito de respiro y seguridad porque es perpetuo. Y gracias a Dios, se ha ido desarrollando, se ha ido fortaleciendo, ha ido mejorando a medida que ha pasado el tiempo. El fideicomiso les da a las personas un título de propiedad, que no es el título de propiedad común y corriente. En ese titulo de propiedad les da derecho, verdad, a permanecer ahí. El terreno pertenece al fideicomiso, pero esa estructura es de las personas./ Thanks to the partners and the Enlace project, we have managed to choose this tool which is the land trust. The land trust gives us a little bit of respite and security because it is perpetual. And thanks to God, it has been developed, it has been strengthened, it has been improved as time has gone by. The trust gives people a title to property, which is not the ordinary title to property. In that title, it gives them the right, indeed, to remain there. The land belongs to the trust, but that structure belongs to the people.

For the G-8 and Enlace, assuring the families' right to permanence in the land of their communities is central for the project of *el dragado*. Therefore, having created a land trust through a participatory process would give them the power needed to safeguard their rights against any political interference. Notwithstanding, the community have had to fight to uphold what they have accomplished with this land trust. For example, in 2009 the hostile neoliberal administration of Luis Fortuño open the door to developers to expropriate the land that were part of the land trust under the false premise of giving individual title to the residents through Act 32, an amendment to article 16 of Act 489 (Cotté Morales, 2010). This demonstrates how the local governments continued to threaten *el Caño* communities' permanence. Fortunately, the residents of *El Caño* were able to recover those lands in 2013 by way of legislation.

SUMMARY

The organizing work guided by Enlace's community social worker, led not only to the transformation of an engineering project but it also led the way to a group of eight historical working communities in becoming *actores de su propio futuro* for the first time. After experiencing historical discrimination and marginalization from the local government, the residents from *el Caño* felt empowered to design a better future for their community's well-

being. Their dreams of transforming *el Caño* has been capture in comprehensive development plan (PDI) designed with active participation of *el Caño*'s residents. The main demand included in this plan, is the dredging and restoration of 3.7 miles of *Caño Martín Peña*, a water tidal channel located in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the permanece of the communities in their land. This plan also includes their aspirations of a better education for the *el Caño*'s youth.

This chapter illustrated how *el Caño*'s residents developed a *apoderamiento comunitario* through the community organizing work grounded in a Freirean approach. Along with *sentido de pertenencia* to the lands that their *antepasados* and *abuelos* created, this *apoderamiento comunitario* gave the community the power to actively participate in the creation of a public policy that would guarantee the materialization of the future they designed for *el Caño*. Lastly, the school in leadership and social transformation project stems from the organizing work *Grupo de las ocho comunidades del Caño Martín Peña, Inc.* (G-8) and *Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña* (Enlace) has been doing in *El Caño*'s communities since 2002.

CHAPTER 6

ANSWERING TO *EL CAÑO'S* KNOWLEDGE

The main purpose of this project is to understand how an experienced community-based

organization, along with a group of social workers from a public corporation, worked to forge a

collaboration with the Department of Education in Puerto Rico (DEPR) for the development and

implementation of a K-5 curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation. After

learning in the previous chapter how a governmental initiative to restore *El Caño* was

transformed into a community participatory environmental restoration project as a result of a

community organizing process, here I foreground the community participatory G-8 and Enlace

educational project of *La Escuela en Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*

that led to the collaborative agreement with the DEPR's leadership. The stories that are central to

this chapter revolve around the community participatory initiatives started by G-8's *Colectivo*

Comunitario en Educatición for the curriculum project on leadership and social transformation,

and the collaboration established between G-8, Inc. and the DEPR both having started in 2016.

Community leaders' stories and *testimonios* from the previous chapter also inform the analysis

on the curriculum project which is the focus of this chapter along with the stories of G-8's

Colectivo Comunitario en Educación member AM and two collaborators. Also, the narratives

conveyed in this chapter are informed by documentation related to the community curriculum

deliberation, which include the 2016 collaboration agreement between G-8, Inc. and DEPR.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the following research questions of this project:

- o How has the collaboration between *El Caño*'s community-based organization, G-
  8, Inc., and the centralized Department of Education in Puerto Rico emerged and
  evolved in the context of the development and implementation of an innovative

educational project with a focus on leadership and social transformation in a
public elementary school?

- To what extent, have other community initiatives lead by El Caño's
  community organizing groups, informed the emergent collaboration and
  the curriculum design process?

  o How did the G-8, Inc. leadership involved in the curriculum deliberation process
  seek to accomplish their goals of social and environmental justice with the
  implementation of a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation
  in a local elementary school within the context of El Caño's environmental
  restoration project? How did this process impact the G8-DEPR's collaboration?

Based on the stories shared by collaborators regarding the emergence and challenges of
the G-8's collaboration with the centralized DEPR, and the existing documentation related to that
process, I learned the following:

1) As part of *el Caño*'s comprehensive developmental plan, it was important for G-8 and
   Enlace leadership to *transformar la educación* (bring educational change) in the school
   and transform the relationship with the community through a collaborative agreement
   with the DEPR which included the implementation of a curriculum focus on leadership
   and social transformation.

2) The curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation designed with *el Caño*
   residents' participation became a contested terrain/object during the deliberation process
   between G-8's leadership and the DEPR to implement and open the school in leadership
   and social transformation.

3) Community and educational leadership collaboration to *transformar la educación* (bring educational change) to the schools serving *el Caño*'s young residents delved into a contentious partnership due to the politics of coloniality that operates in the centralized DEPR administration and the tensions that result from the G-8's decolonial acts to *transformar la educación* in a community school.

I begin by presenting how and why G-8's community leaders and Enlace engaged to develop a curriculum project as a response to the *pobre* (poor) education they understood *el Caño*'s young people have been receiving at the schools they attend. Then, I present the conceptual idea about what the *Colectivo Comunitario en Educación* wanted this project to be for the community. Later, I outline how the community leadership established the collaborative agreement with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico to *transformar la educación* in *el Caño*'s schools. Next, I outline the participatory curriculum design work for the curriculum on leadership and social transformation. I also present the contested activity that emerged from the curriculum design process. Then, I summarize how the collaborative agreement that opened the door for the educational project was jeopardized by a change in the DEPR's centralized administration and a lack of support of the local school principal and faculty. The last section presents the steps the community leadership planned to take to make *Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña* a reality for their youths.

"*LA EDUCACIÓN ES FUNDAMENTAL:*" EDUCATION IN *EL CAÑO*'S ORGANIZING WORK

In this section, I outline the importance the educational initiatives had to the community organizing work. I also discussed what were the main reasons for the G-8 and Enlace leadership to seek a collaborative agreement with the DEPR for the implementation of a curriculum on

leadership and social transformation. I present how the G-8's leadership was moved to work on an educational project to *transformar la educación* in a local elementary school after they witnessed how *el Caño*'s children have had receive a *educación pobre/* poor education (CF, Interview) through *escuela tradicional*/traditional schooling.

Based on the interviews and existing documentation, this section focuses on how G-8 and Enlace draw upon their experiences as community leaders where they witnessed how the younger generations can be *líderes* in their community while also watched how the *escuela tradicional* is offering them a poor education jeopardizing the holistic development they designed for the community. In words of one of the leaders, one cannot have a whole community development if the school serving the community do not align with the community's development plan. As a result, the leadership wanted to resort to their *apoderamiento comunitario* and *transformar la educación* for *el Caño*'s younger generations.

As part of the comprehensive development plan (*Plan de Desarrollo Integral, PDI*), "*la voz de las comunidades*", *El Caño*'s G-8, Inc. took action and organized towards the design of a school that aligned with the "*filosofía comunitaria*" (community's philosophy) that is embedded in the social, economic, environmental and urban revitalization the eight communities were fighting for (Acuerdo citar). In the collaborative agreement with the DEPR signed in December 15, 2016, the G-8 explicitly noted that "*la educación tiene un rol fundamental*" (Education have a crucial role) (cita, p.2) in promoting the economic and social wellbeing to empowered *el Caño*'s communities. Here, the G-8 not only refers to education in a formal fashion through schooling, but also to the crucial role education plays in the process of community organizing. As noted in the previous chapter, Enlace's community social workers undertook a myriad of initiatives to engage and empower *Caño*'s residents during the process of community organizing.

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These included: using popular education strategies, community teach-in sessions, and leadership programs for youth. Below I offer three examples to illustrate these initiatives.

In this first example, community social workers used popular education strategies such as popular theater and comic strip in order to promote *participación ciudadana* and bringing together *El Caño*'s communities (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 174). The experience of popular education in the community organizing work in *el Caño* was similar to others in Latin America and United States which is foreign to governmental agencies (Beder, 1996, p. 74). In *el Caño*'s case, the popular education methodology was compatible with the participatory planning approach brought to the community work. Among these strategies social workers use comic strips, *teatro popular*, and community newspapers. For instance, young folks from LIJAC along Proyecto Enlace wrote and designed a comic title "*Remando en la misma dirección: hacia la construcción de la nueva historia del Caño*" (Figure 2). The purpose of the comic was to "*explicar a los residentes lo que es el fideicomiso*/explain residents what the land trust is about" (emphasis in the original) and it would be complemented with "*reuniones comunitarias para discutir su contenido*/community meetings to discuss its content." The comic included contact information to Enlace's Citizen Participation Office for residents to reach out more information about the *Fideicomiso* or *Proyecto Enlace*. It was through these initiatives that community social workers facilitated a process of reflection with the residents to critically analyze how their immediate needs were related to their condition as oppressed subjects because of the historical marginalization from the state (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 174). Cotté Morales (2010) noted that these strategies also create the space for the residents to critically reflect on how their active participation could transform their living conditions, or as Freire refer, to became agents of change. The experience in *el Caño* reflected the components of praxis, collective and

participatory orientation, and action that are present in the methodology of popular education

(Beder, 1996).

Figure 2.

Cover of the comic book "Remando en la misma dirección" used for the popular education program about the land trust.
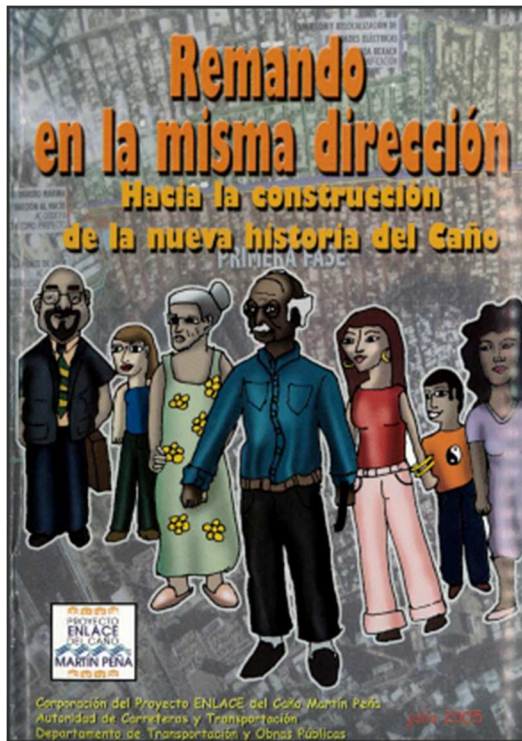
The second example, which was described to me by AC, involved the creation of

Universidad del Barrio (UBA), which involved community teach-in session with scholars from

local higher educational institutions. AC explained that once the leadership was organized,

community leaders gathered in UBA once a month to "*pensar críticamente*" (think critically)

about the judicial, social, cultural, and political structures at work in Puerto Rico. He further

explained that at the beginning the residents were not comfortable with the education they were

receiving because they saw it as too political to the "left wing." Later, however, they understood

that it was important to understand how the socio-political system works. AC explicitly

described this educational program as *educación política* (political education), which at the same

time aimed to create a space to "*pensar críticamente*." The creation of this space aligns with the Freirean approach used by the social workers during the community organizing process. As noted in the previous chapter, for community leaders developing a *pensamiento crítico* through initiatives like UBA allowed them to be part of the transformation of their communities. In contrast with the education offered in la *escuela pública tradicional*, the educational initiatives of the organizing work in *el Caño* aimed to engage community members in the transformation of the social structures that hindered their right to have safe housing and also a high quality and just education.

The third example, (see also, González Flores, 2019) involves how the G-8 and Enlace viewed young people as resources rather than deficit. As evidenced by a mural in one of the communities which reads: "*aquí los niños y jóvenes tiene voz y voto*" (Here, children and youth have the right to vote and speak), the approach community leaders adopted when working with youth has been in the form of ally ship and mentorship which empowers young people to develop that "*sentido de pertenencia, ese amor por la comunidad*" (Sense of belonging, that love for your community) (Interview, Carmen). Young people between the ages of 10 to 25 attended the leadership programs like *Líderes Juveniles en Acción* (LIJAC). This program hosted discussions around civic participation, inequality and power, among other topics. As UBA, LIJAC was described by AC to be political education as the program aim to develop a critical consciousness around the social problems in their communities and how to transform those problems through community organizing (Cotté Morales, 2010, p. 180). The *LIJAC's* education program and their focus on socio political issues foster a civic agency in youth participant to actively take part in their community (González Flores, 2019, p. 19). As youths became more conscious of the problems affecting *el Caño*, they became transformative agents with a strong

sentido de pertenencia toward their communities. Enlace and G-8 have also turned to sport-related community programs which include violence prevention workshops in order to address the leadership concern around violence among *el Caño*'s youth in a participatory way. The community leaders interviewed for this project recognized the importance of having young people involve in the community organizing work as youth are the generational renewal that would continue *la lucha por el dragado* when the elders time to step out arrived. With this in mind, community leaders expressed their concerns about how young people from *el Caño* were not getting the same educational opportunities other youth outside their communities were having.

An important commonality across the three examples is how these educational initiatives contribute to developed a *apoderamiento comunitario*/community empowerment in a multigenerational form among residents. This *apoderamento commnitario* was a result of a collective critical reflection on the historical living conditions and how to transform them. From a decolonial stance, this collective empowerment was repositioning *el Caño*'s residents as agents of change, or as AC noted in interview, "*sujetos vivos*." Even greater, the project of decolonization strives for empowerment (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 14). Hence, by promoting *apoderamiento comunitario* in *el Caño*'s communities G-8's community organizing became a decolonizing work that counters hundreds of years of colonialism and coloniality that aim to erasure them from their land (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Una educación pobre: unequal education in *el Caño*

While I just explained the different educational strategies to illustrate the *rol fundamental* education have played in the community organizing work, it is also important to point out that the leaders were also concerned with the role that youths' literacy needs played in this process.

For instance, after working for years with youth, Enlace and G-8 were concerned that some youth were struggling with reading and writing. As I note bellow, community leadership considered the traditional and poor education to cause the youth to be further relegated in reading and writing, with significant long term disadvantage. For example, EQ expressed in an interview that after 30 years working in public school, she noticed how the way *el Caño*'s children were poorly treated in school. For her, this could be seen by how *rezagados* (fall behind) students were at the end of their elementary school as they could not get into specialized schools in their District because of their GPA, or when they entered middle school some of them did not know how to read or write. In the same context, CF noted in interview how in the school were the new curriculum was supposed to be implemented she knew of third graders that did not how to read or write. For the community leadership having young people falling behind and not flourishing at their full potential was a form of discrimination and a result of having a school with a curriculum and teachers that were not responsive to the community. I would argue, that this form of discrimination and educational inequality can also be tied to the historical systemic marginalization *el Caño*'s communities have been experiencing which they have worked to transform through their organizing work.

Thus, the hierarchical relationship between school and community, where school is the center and the community is at the periphery (Ghiso & Campano, 2013), broaden neglect *el Caño*'s children and youth from receiving a high quality education that is responsive to their lived experiences. In an interview, AC attributed the fact that youth from *el Caño* could not read or write to the *escuela pública tradicional* (traditional public school). By this he meant that the traditional school was functioning as what Freire (2012) refers to as a banking education. This traditional form of education for AC was part of the problem that further harmed the school-

community relationship. AC explained: *Entonces cuando tu ves que tienes muchos chamaquitos y chamaquitas, que salen peor de lo que entraron en algunos casos, y que siempre se le echa la culpa a la familia o a la comunidad, pues hay un problema* (So, when you see that you have a lot of little kids that they come out worse than they went in, in some cases, and that the blame is always on the family or the community, then there is a problem).

For AC and the majority of the community leadership interviewed, teachers in *el Caño*'s schools have been in some way responsible for most of students not knowing how to write or read at the end of elementary school. During an interview EQ described what for her are teaching practices that are not supporting students to thrive in schools. She believed that while parents should be involved in their children's education, teachers should design differentiate lesson plans were all students can receive the instruction according to their particular needs. EQ further explained that as long teachers are using a one fits all approach with children those that are *rezagados* will be kept behind. In EQ's words:

> *Esos nenes que tienen esos rezagos, porque el maestro quiso avanzar con el grupo cuandose supone que un maestro, si tiene que hacer tres planes, los tiene que hacer. Es así, porque a lo mejor yo no soy como es aquel. ¿Pero, como tú vas a trabajar conmigo?* (Those kids who have those lags, because the teacher wanted to move forward with the group when a teacher, if he has to make three lesson plans, he has to make them. That's right, because maybe I'm not like that one [who's more advance]. But how are you going to work with me?)

EQ is not only drawing from her experience as community leader, but also as a mother, grandmother and an administrative worker in public schools. As she expressed in interview: "*todo eso yo lo viví* (I've lived through all that). Like EQ, other community leaders interviewed in this project recounted how they have witnessed this happening across schools. To ameliorate this situation, Enlace and G-8 have opened after-school programs to help students with their homework and a literacy program for adults in the community as some parents also needed

support to help their children at home. But for the community leadership there was more to be done for the betterment of young people's education in *el Caño*.

While it can be argued that one of the main reasons of these educational inequalities is grounded on the socioeconomic disparities between *el Caño*'s families and other affluent communities in San Juan, I also contend that these educational inequalities should also be considered to be part of the systematic disregard from the government toward the communities. For example, since the school closure policy the DEPR started in 2010, with 2017 as the year with most closure with 179 public schools closed, in *el Caño*'s district five out of eight elementary schools were closed. Having school closed and receiving a *pobre educación* in the few that are open, is denying younger generations from *el Caño* the right to an equitable and just education. This reminded me of CF assertion in the previous chapter about how the government was not investing in the communities' infrastructure so residents would get tired of the flooding and leave their land so "*los grandes intereses*" could take over. These actions of government neglect towards *el Caño* are following relationships of subordination that has been normalized by the politics of coloniality.

The school-community relationship and the educational outcomes from that relationship described by the community leadership resemblance other experiences community based organizations have had in their neighborhoods (Fuentes, 2013; Ishimaru, 2019). Like in other communities, *el Caño*'s residents have seen how the deteriorated communities and *pobre educación* in their neighborhoods schools reflect the government neglect supported by neoliberal policies. From a decolonial perspective, *el Caño*'s environmental degradation and a sub-standard education in the schools serving the communities are part of the stablished institutions under

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coloniality "that locate the colonized in a precarious place of existence" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 15).

Un currículo del barrio: the need of a responsive curriculum

Another aspect that community leaders understand as central to support *el Caño*'s young people in schools revolves around the curriculum. For the community leadership, this curriculum should relate to young people's participation in their communities, and that move away from the banking education (Freire, 2012) paradigm. G-8's President, LC, explained in an interview that she understands that schools needed to have a curriculum that younger generations can relate with. In her words:

> *Pues entonces el problema es [que] la educación que existe [hoy día se basa en] el mismo currículo desde el año de las guácaras, como uno dice, en vez de adaptarlo a los tiempos, no lo hacen./* The problem is [that] the education that exists [today is based on] the same curriculum since cave times, as saying goes, instead of adapting it to the times they do not.

After working for so many years with children and youth from their community, LC, and G-8's leadership understand that the curriculum in schools are not align with the needs of *el Caño*'s young people.

In their leadership programs they have seen how young people are empowered by the educational approach enacted in these initiatives by following their philosophy of recognizing children and youth right to "*voz y voto.*" Therefore, for them "*la escuela pública tradicional*" does not have a curriculum that reflect the reality *el Caño*. AC in an interview described the following:

> *Y entendíamos que hacía falta, mirando lo que era la escuela pública y tradicional un poco crear un currículo lo más a fin a la comunidad. Un currículo que responda a la realidad del barrio. ¿Ves? Entonces, cuando tú [como estudiante] vas a una escuela pública y te hablan, [estando] en el barrio, de la manera tradicional y se sigue trabajando la formación tradicional, linear, bancaria, entonces hay un problema/* And we understood that it was necessary, [after] looking at what was the public and traditional

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school, to create a curriculum that align as much as possible to the community. A curriculum that responds to the reality of the *barrio*. See? So, when you go [as a student] to a public school and they talk to you, [while] in the *barrio*, in the traditional way and they continue to work the traditional, linear, banking peadagogy, then there is a problem.

For the community leadership, the current standard curriculum from the Department of Education in Puerto Rico (DEPR) enacted in schools and its banking pedagogical approach was alienating young people. Particularly, the language use when the curriculum is enacted while "[*estando*] *en el barrio*" do not speak to the reality young people is facing in *el Caño*.

This in turn speaks to the way coloniality operates in the state curriculum where the politics of standardization erase home and community experiences from schooling and centers a uniform narrative from those in power. For AC, the current curriculum "*no se parte de la realidad de las comunidades, se parte de la realidad del país (supuestamente) del país que, que él que…está privilegiao parte*/ it does not part from the reality of the communities, it does part from the reality of a country (supposedly) that those with privilege live" (Interview). The historically marginalization experienced by *el Caño*'s communities is reflected not only in the environmental problem they face but also in the unequal education young residents are receiving in schools they attend. Above the community leadership described how they encountered many youths struggling to read and write in elementary schools as a result of the *educación pobre* (Interview, EQ) they received.

For the G-8 and Enlace's leadership, having a school aligned with the *filosofía comunitaria* was an opportunity to continued their community organizing work with youth in formal education. At the same time, it was also an opportunity to *transformar la educación* (bring educational change) to the schools where *el Caño*'s children were receiving *una educación pobre* (a poor education). Consequently, in June 2016 the G-8's "*Colectivo*

Comnunitario en Educación: La escuela que queremos" (*El Colectivo*) was created to initiate the works around the school project.

Summary

Education has played a fundamental role in the organizing work and the transformation of *el Caño*. Multigenerational group of leaders have been brought up by the educative initiatives organized by Enlace's social workers. Meanwhile, the community leaders have pointed out at how a traditional curriculum and a baking education approach in schools have failed to assert young people rights to a high-quality education and access to literacy. As part of their organizing work toward *el Caño*'s social and environmental transformation, it was time for the G-8's leadership to bring change to school so both community and education could be change by their residents.

"*LA ESCUELA QUE QUEREMOS*:" A COMMUNITY RESPONSE

In the following, I focus on the community leadership's response to transform the *pobre educación el Caño*'s children were receiving in *escuela tradicional*. The G-8's community work to *transformar la educación* started with the creation of *Colectivo Comunitario en Educación (El Colectivo)*. When G-8's *Colectivo* started their work in June 2016, it was composed by about eleven people. Among them, CF and AC. *El Colectivo*'s work laid the guidelines for the educational project towards what in their words would be "*la escuela que queremos*," and which culminate in the collaborative agreement with the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) for the *Escuela en Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*.

I argue that the guidelines aimed to tackle the structural and material conditions in schooling the community leadership understood needed to be transform in order to provide a public education *el Caño*'s young people deserved. The guidelines also included how the school

could aligned with their organizing work. Based on their work, below I will discuss key themes I believe capture how the G-8 wanted to the community participation to be in the process of collaboration to have a school in leadership and social transformation. These areas are: a) Educational Plan for the Community; b) Students Participation in the Community; c) Community-School Partnership and d) *Formación Política* (political education) in the Curriculum. Through the discussion I also include the stories shared during the interview that relate to the needs noted by *el Colectivo* in the proposed conceptual draft for the school.

Educational Plan from and for the Community

The first point *el Colectivo* highlighted, was the development of a *Plan Educativo* that *"responda a la comunidad, a la gente del Caño"* (responsive to *El Caño*'s community and its people). Thus, for *el Colectivo* this *Plan Educativo* should rest on the idea that schools should be responsive to the needs and interests of the community. This idea represented a new paradigm in the school-community relationship especially in the context of the community organizing work *la gente del Caño* has been involved since 2002. Moreover, the fight for the permanence of the communities and *el dragado* is the backdrop to this new relation. Therefore, when developing the school's *Plan Educativo* it was important to include how the school could insert itself in *la lucha por el dragado* and build on the *apoderamiento comunitario* parents and residents have developed through the community participatory work in the environmental restoration project.

The idea of having a *Plan educativo* that was responsive to the community respond to the ongoing hierarchical relationship where the community was left out of school's matters. For example, according to the community leadership the school administration from Emilio del Toro School (where the new project was supposed to be implemented) systematically left parents outside of the school premises and from school matters to that effect. In addition, the principal

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ignored parents' request to meet and talk about how they could be more present in the school. This is an example of how a school that was supposed to function under the principle of a community school by law, in practice, was further marginalizing parents and *el Caño*'s communities from participating in the school's governance activities. In accordance to the DEPR's policy that was in place by the time the school project started on school organization and Act 149-199 (former *Ley Orgánica del Departamento de Educación*) schools in Puerto Rico belong to the communities they serve and those communities should participate of the schools' governance. In the context of the school project this represented a bigger obstacle for the G-8's leadership as the school administration was not hold accountable for impeding them to participate in the school governance's matters. Moreover, the fact that the school was not following the policy in place represented for the residents and the community leadership an obstacle to exercise their *apoderamiento comunitario* further lacerating the community-school relationship. Therefore, the claim of developing an educative plan responsive to "*la comunidad, y la gente del Caño*" speaks to how *la gente del Caño* have had to navigate DEPR's policies that at the end were dead letter when it comes to assert communities' right to actively participate in schools' matters.

Other issue *el Colectivo* wanted to tackle by proposing a *Plan Educativo* was the partisanship in the educational policymaking. The G-8's community leadership has been aware of this reality in Puerto Rico's politics based on their historical work for *el dragado*. Hence, *el Colectivo* included in their conceptual draft for the school that the *Plan Educativo* cannot change every four years (cite). By noting the importance of having an educational plan that is not subject to the swinging of political parties, they wanted to stress their concern of the historical influence of partisanship in the policy making of the centralized DEPR. At the same time, for *el Colectivo*

having partisanship out of the equation would ensure that the *plan de educativo* will in fact respond to *la comunidad, a la gente del Caño*. Simultaneously, having an educational plan designed by the community which at the same time will not be subject to the alternation in government administration is a way of having "*la gente hacienda política pública*/the residents as policymaker" (Interview, AC) for the education of younger generations in *el Caño* as they did for the developmental plan.

Students Participation in the Community. For the G-8's leadership having young people actively participating of the community work has been key to ensure a generational relay towards *el dragado*. If we considered the active participation *el Caño*'s children and youths through leadership development program, having a *escuela tradicional* (traditional school) is counterproductive for the consequential community work they has been involved. Therefore, for the community leadership was important to have a school where young people could also be part of the community's projects. This idea rest on disrupting the hierarchy where the school is at the center and the community at the periphery. As long as the traditional school maintain this relationship, students will not see themselves as agent of change in their community. Today, schools in *el Caño* and Puerto Rico maintain their gates closed once students enter their grounds and do not have contact with the "outside" world until it is time to go home. Hence, *el Colectivo* wanted to have a school where students could see the school as a space in the community to reflect on the issues affecting their communities and how to engage in the community work that aim to transform those conditions.

Schools as site of social and culture reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Mills, 2008; Patel, 2016b) became a space where young people lived experiences are left out of the classroom. Moreover, many young people that see themselves as agent of change do not find in

schools the support to take action to transform their communities (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 2; Restrepo Nazar, 2018). Thus, the community leadership wanted to support young people as agent of change by advocating for a school where they could examine the sociopolitical context affecting their communities in order to take action to transform those issues.

Community-School Partnership. One aspect the community leadership wanted to address with the educational project was the community participation in school matters. For *el Colectivo* community participation in school should go beyond the service residents and parents can offered to the school. The participation of the community in the school they envisioned rested in the participatory experience they had during the planning to redevelop and restore *el Caño*. It also rested in the *apoderamiento comunitario* developed by community leaders through the community organizing process. For example, in the educational project guidelines it was included that the school governance should be based on a democratic participatory approach where the power resides in the community. Here, the community leadership was reimagining how an empowered community could affect change in the schools serving their children and youths.

At the same time, *el Colectivo* thought about having a school open to parents where they are welcome to participate in school matters and their children education. In order to this to happened, the community leadership understood that the school mission and vision should have the student at its center. Based on the experiences describe above, they wanted to see this materialize and not as a mere euphemism as school authorities like to use. In other words, the community leadership wanted to have a school where students' wellbeing and academic success

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would be guarantee by responding to their needs and having the community to work along in this process.

As a community-based organization that have worked to transform their communities, the G-8's organizing work was now moving towards bringing change to school (Gold et al., 2004b; Warren, 2011). Nevertheless, the G-8's leadership understood that school-based relations hindered the possibilities to bring the educational change needed in *el Caño*'s schools. Hence, reconfiguring the existing relations between the school and the community was an imperative in order to move forward their educational project. For the community leadership efforts those relations should be horizontal and participatory as they were aiming to have an active role in school matters, including the curriculum. This proposal aimed to disrupt the historical colonial legacies embedded in deficit-school-based relationship with communities and families (Baquedano□López et al., 2014). In other words, it aimed to decolonized power relations in a centralized educational system that have served the colonial project since its inception in the Puerto Rican society.

***Formación Política* in Curriculum**. Community leaders from *el Colectivo* wanted to have a curriculum that simultaneously increase academic literacy among *el Caño*'s children while also promote *pensamiento crítico* from a *formación política* standpoint. This educational approach proposed by the community leadership was drawing from their experience with initiatives like the ones described at the beginning of this chapter (e.g. LIJAC). Moreover, G-8 and Enlace wanted to provide an education for young people to be agents of change in their community. In an interview, AC described to me how the current model of traditional school was not on par with *el Caño*'s comprehensive development plan. He added that students' education was not on par with the *educación política* (political education) that was taking place as part of

the community organizing work. For G-8's leaders interviewed during this project, having a curriculum align with the community's political educational work, was an opportunity to develop young people into community leaders. For example, in one of the of the guidelines proposed the community leadership explicitly noted the need of a curriculum that address "*el conocimiento de los derechos*" (knowledge on rights). For the community leadership knowing *los derechos* give residents of *el Caño* and citizen in general the power to speak up and take action for their rights. At the same time, *el conocimiento de los derechos* goes hand by hand of the *formación política*.

This curriculum approach the community leadership included in this guidelines go on par with critical pedagogy (Apple, 2011; Monzó & McLaren, 2014; Morrell, 2007). Considering Paulo Freire as the precursor this pedagogical practice and the Freirean approach that cemented the community organizing work in *el Caño*, it can be said that it was expected that a pedagogical approach proposed by *el Colectivo* would align with critical pedagogy. Nevertheless, the pedagogical practice formulated by the leadership, which is based on *educación política*, *pensamiento crítico*, *conocimiento de los derechos*, derives from their philosophy of praxis. In other words, it was from their actions and their leadership in *la lucha por el dragado* that their pedagogical ideas originated from and at the same time are the embodiment of critical pedagogy.

After having witnessed how youths are struggling to read, write and stay in school, community leadership started to reimaging how they could bring educational change to the school in their communities. Each of the guidelines discussed above are the areas *el Colectivo* understood needed to be transform in order to have the school they envisioned for the young people from *el Caño*. By addressing each of these areas the leadership is reimaging how the community can be at the center of this transformation as they were during the participatory planning process discussed in the previous chapter. At the same time, by placing the community

at the center they wanted to change the paradigm and disrupt the hierarchical relationship in the school experience. Therefore, this was consequential to their community organizing work for *el dragado*. From a decolonial standpoint the reimagination of the public traditional school by *el Colectivo* is repositioning the community knowledge which aim to improve the education for *el Caño*'s young people.

By repositioning their *saberes* to *transfomar la educación*, community leaders are also reimagining what knowledge should be in the curriculum and how that curriculum should be taught in order to bring a social transformation in *el Caño*. Based on their *praxis liberadora* as community leaders they noted that the pedagogical practice needed to be political and should aim for *pensamiento crítico* so *el Caño*'s young people became agents of change in their community and Puerto Rico. This is the same pedagogical practice that we can find in Freirean critical pedagogy. Thus, Freire's critical pedagogy as a philosophy of praxis is the best fit to the educational project because it centers the lived experiences of *el Caño*'s resident community organizing work in *tansformar* their communities and *la educación* for younger generations. In fact, in the following section on the curriculum we will see how the community leadership adopted Freire's *pedagogía liberadora* as one of their philosophical frameworks for the educational project.

Following the decolonial stance, the guidelines proposed by *el Colectivo* to build the educational project is a political response to liberate *el Caño*'s youths from the epistemic violence (i.e. the continued subjugation of the communities' *saberes*) they have experienced in school and reinstate their right to the a public education that is responsive to them and their community. This epistemic disobedience act was expected to take place within the same school public system that was neglecting young people's right to education and pushing the community

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out of school. Next, they move forward to bring their educational project to the elementary

public school, Emilio del Toro y Cuebas, by building a collaborative agreement with the DEPR

TOWARDS A *CURRÍCULO VIVO*

In this section I outline the participatory process led by the G-8 leadership to build the

curriculum for the educational project *Escuela de Liderazgo para la Transformación Social del*

Caño Martín Peña (School on Leadership for the Social transformation of Caño Martín Peña).

I agree with AC when he said in an interview that for the DEPR the curriculum was a

amenaza (menace) to the DEPR as its content aimed to *formar políticamente* (offered political

education) children in elementary school. However, the philoshophy of the curriculum and the

structure of the curriculum was following the DEPR guidelines and public policy. Thus, in this

section I present how *el Caño*'s residents, community leadership, teachers and outside

collaborators participate in the curriculum design process and what are the main themes guiding

what community leaders understand is a transformative education. This section also include the

contention that emerged from the curriculum design process between G-8's leadership and

DEPR.

First, I present the philosophical background laid by the community leadership which

simultaneously was guiding the educational project and the curriculum design. Then, I outline

the participatory process in building the curriculum in leadership and social transformation.

Particularly, how residents' *saberes* and lived experiences were brought front and center during

the process. I closed this section with the discussion around the curriculum as a contested object

as the DEPR's was pushing back on the content the community leadership and other

collaborators developed. Across the discussion I highlight how the community work during this

process present decolonial acts grounded in their *apoderamiento comunitario* by repositioning

knowledge about curriculum from the DEPR's colonial administration to the residents as *actores de su propio futuro*.

Philosophical Background

Before entering in the discussion of how the participatory curriculum design was put together by the G-8 and Enlace, I understand it is important to recognize, at least briefly, the philosophical background for this community educational project. The community leadership found in the figures of Eugenio María de Hostos and Paulo Freire the philosophical background the pedagogical ideas that align with their community work and their vision of what a *una educación liberadora* should be.

The figures of these two pedagogical thinkers are evoked explicitly in the collaboration agreement between the G-8 and DEPR leaderships. In this document the community leadership outline the pedagogical principles and methodological approaches from Hostos and Freire they understood better represented their trajectory as a community organization. The G-8 started off by presenting Hostos' ideas which considered education "as a process of human liberation and a method of social transformation to develop a whole human being" (my translation). This statement aligns to what they understand is a *educación liberadora* toward a social transformation in *el Caño* and Puerto Rico. Additionally, Hostos' educational philosophy on moral values and its goal to elicit *pensamiento crítico* among students is a pedagogical goal that has been part of the community organizing work. By fostering a *pensamiento crítico* among young people in school classroom, students can find the tools to "analyze and interpret the socio-historical context where they live and develop" (my translation). Having a *pensamiento crítico* for the G-8's leadership was key during the community organizing work as it helps them to understand the historical conditions of marginalization *el Caño*'s communities have had to

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navigate and take the actions that were needed to transform these conditions and build a better future.

For the G-8's leadership Freire's pedagogy of liberation is the methodology that would materialize Hostos' philosophy (cite agreement) in their educational project. The Freirean approach is well known by the community leadership as it has been the methodology AC and Enlace's social workers resorted from to organize *el Caño*'s residents and build the community power that led to the participatory developmental plan that would lead the transformation of their communities and the Caño Martín Peña. In addition to materialize Hostos' educational approach, bringing Freire to the educational project make sense to the community because for them Freire's dialogical approach and conscientization have given them the tools to critically analyze their history as a community and the social, political and economic structures that need to be transform. Based on their experiences working with Freire's methodology as part of the organizing work with *el Caño*'s residents, including children and youths, the community leadership wanted to bring those pedagogical practices to the educational community school project. The way the community describe *escuela de liderazgo*'s mission, explicitly refers to the implementation of "*un modelo educativo*" that promotes leadership among students, based on "*un análisis crítico*" of their social reality with the goal of transforming their society. For the community, having a *estudiante líder* should be able to be part of the continuous community development processes, but also in Puerto Rico while having *un compromiso con la humanidad* (G-8, Inc.)

Community Participation in Curriculum Deliberation

Among the problems identified by the G-8's leadership it was noted the lack of a *currículo vivo*/living curriculum that was relevant to students' reality and the community they

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are part of. At the early stage of the project, the idea of working on a curriculum rested on receiving the DEPR's support. Eventually, the DEPR's support was not what it was expected and the community leadership had to reach at other collaborators to help them in putting together the curriculum. The communities wanted to have a curriculum that simultaneously could improve the public educational experience *el Caño*'s children have had to navigate and have an innovated school program that would see promoting younger generation of community leaders. In this section, I outline the work that took place during the community participatory curriculum design. Then, a summary about the collaboration from G-8 and Enlace's social network, and how the leadership and collaborators navigate the tensions that emerge between the community leadership and DEPR around the curriculum on leadership and social transformation.

Curriculum Deliberation. The curriculum deliberation started as part of a series of *mesas de trabajo*. The idea was to have *el Caño*'s residents, children and leadership to discuss what the collaborative educational project to be proposed to the DEPR's leadership should include based on the guidelines laid by *el Colectivo*'s work describe in a previous section. The approach to participate in the discussion was consistent with the Freirean method of the dialog and questioning that is part both of the curriculum philosophy and the community organizing work in *el Caño*. It also opens the space for the *saberes* that circulate in *el Caño*'s communities and can be recover from the unsettling experiences with schooling and school, as the ones mentioned above. As AC explained in an interview, the purpose of this participatory approach *el Caño*'s residents, collaborators and teachers as well, could bring their *saberes* to the table and contribute based on their experiences. For instance, community leaders like EQ and AM who have worked in the DEPR and know "las mañas y todo lo demás que había en el DEPR/ the

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tricks and everything else that was in the DEPR" (AM, Interview) they brought that experience to the process.

During the *mesa de trabajo* on the curriculum, participants engaged in a discussion of how to include the main themes of leadership and social transformation across subject areas for each grade level. While at that moment the curriculum design has not started, the participants agreed that these themes should be present through the curriculum as it was imperative to have students thinking around the possibilities to became leaders and transform their community. Here, the discussion around the inclusion of the main themes in the curriculum could be considered arbitrary, but from a critical pedagogical point of view residents wanted to bring to the classroom the opportunity for students to imagine the community they wanted and to see themselves as agent of that change (Scott, 2006).

Other aspect discussed in regards the curriculum design was to have some coordinator that could *acompañar* and make sure that the philosophical background of the educational project was guiding the process. For the leadership having a person that could *acompañar* in this process was key as they wanted to maintain a philosophy that reflect their organizing work and at the same time align with their *filosofía comunitaria*. In the same vein, participants agreed with the community leadership that those collaborating in the curriculum design should also considered the socioeconomic reality of *el Caño*'s communities and the work to transform these conditions that is included in the PDI. As AC said in an interview, it was important to have a *currículo vivo*/living curriculum that responded to the *realidad del barrio*/barrio's reality. As noted by Cruz (2012) the larger discourse in public education around testing, economic and political prestige, make it difficult to have a community-based curriculum in schools (p. 464). For AC and the community leadership that *currículo vivo* was the corner stone of their

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educational project as it would reflect *el Caño*'s needs and what the residents hope to see transform. Therefore, a *curriculo vivo* "that emerge from the community should also return to the community for that transformation could take place" (Dr. MS, Interview).

Across interviews, leaders reaffirm how having a school in *liderazgo y transformación social* would create the space for younger generation became leaders in their community and join the fight for *el dragado* as most of the leaders are entering a new phase in the organizing work. For example, Mario Nuñez is the new Enlace's Director after years as community leader in *el Caño*. This also speaks to the intergenerational work the community leadership wanted to bring to the curriculum as well. This in turn leads to bringing into the schools the *formación política* of the community organizing work that result in having a long time resident and community organizer to oversee the work of development and revitalization of *el Caño*'s communities. Also, the leaders and the community envisioned this educational project to start at the elementary level and later integrate middle school graders as they were the population the leadership wanted to work more closely due to the high rate on early school leaving. The work done in the *mesas de trabajo* around the curriculum continued as other collaborators joined the community leadership efforts in building a transformative curriculum for *el Caño*'s children to move away from the *escuela pública tradicional* that was not responsive to the *realidad del barrio* and the children needs.

"*Y se unió mucha gente*:" Curriculum design. After the community leadership, residents and teacher shared all the ideas and *saberes* about what a curriculum in leadership and social transformation for *el Caño* should be, the next step was to build the curriculum. As LC noted in an interview, the leadership had *el sueño* of having the curriculum but they needed *gente* with the expertise to help them make that dream come true. Reaching other *gente* with the

expertise needed to build the curriculum is consequent with the experience during the participatory planning approach discuss in the previous chapter where a *diálogo de saberes* between experts and the community members was part of the development of the comprehensive developmental plan for *el Caño.* That is how AC and the G-8's leadership started to reach out to Education programs in the University of Puerto Rico and Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, while also tapping other networks they have built as part of their community organizing work. One of those key collaborators was Dra. MS, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras Campus (UPR-RP), whom along her doctoral students, parents, teachers, and others joined the community's efforts to build a curriculum.

In an interview Dra. MS recounted how, by the end of 2016, AC and G-8's leaders reached the faculty from UPR's School of Education Eugenio María de Hostos to presented the educational project on leadership and social transformation for a local school in *el Caño*. The leadership stressed to the scholars in education how important was this educational project for them as it is part of their historical community organizing work to transform the living conditions to *el Caño*'s residents. By the time Dr. MS formally joined the curriculum working group in early 2017, she noted in an interview that the community have had a work done around the *cinco pilares*/five pillars which were the major themes the community leadership considered to be the foundation for the new curriculum. The *cinco pilares* that result from the work described in the previous section are: 1) *Comunidad*; 2) *Derechos Humanos*; 3) *Liderazgo*; 4) *Conciencia Crítica*; 5) *Transformación Social*.

During one *mesa de trabajo* I was invited in July 2017 by AC to learn about the educational project, the five pillars were written in five individual long backing paper, hanging horizontally from one of the wall's in Enlace's main room (Figure 3). In them, a group of social

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workers that were working that summer in the curriculum were jotting notes as the discussion between community leadership and collaborators was taking place. This was the only time I participate in the *mesas de trabajo*.

Figure 3.

Backing paper hanging from the wall with the topic and subtopics on "Transformación Social"
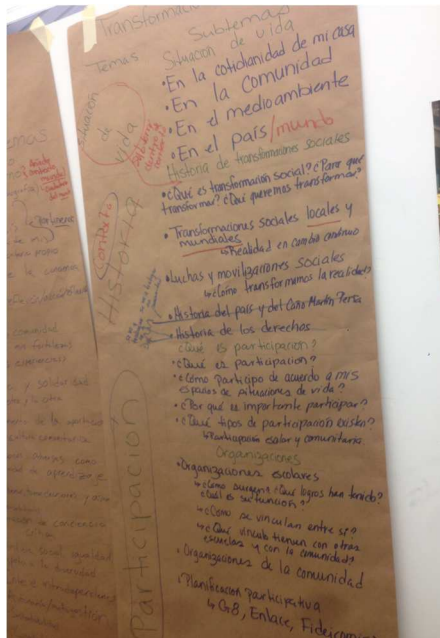
At the *mesa de trabajo* the participants, among them Dr. MS, were having a discussion around each of the *pilares'* main topics, subtopics and some guiding questions for the curriculum. It is important to highlight that each of the *pilares* and their respective topics were openly edited during the meeting by the community leadership and collaborators, including the schoolteacher coordinator of the new curriculum. The active participation of the community leaders in this *diálogo de saberes* around the curriculum was simultaneously raising tensions around the language the community used to identify to the overarching themes. Take for instance *Transformación Social*/Social Transformation which is one of the names for this innovated educational project. During the deliberation process in that meeting it was brought the issue that the DEPR's hierarchy was pushing back on having a unit named *Transformación Social* as its

main theme and it was proposed to change the name to *Cambio Social*/Social Change as a strategic move to advance in the curriculum design process. When consulted, the community leaders present in that meeting decided against the change. While in English *transformación* and *cambio* are direct synonymous, in Spanish changing the name would have not capture the same meaning of *el Caño*'s community work to *transformar* their social and environmental living conditions. This open and active participation exemplify the transparency in the process. It also demonstrates how from the deliberation process itself the community was engaging in a decolonial act to design a curriculum that was aiming to disrupt power at the central and school level. As Baquedano-López and colleagues noted by building on Frantz Fanon and Sandy Grande's work, decolonial actions by historical colonized communities towards knowledge recovery does not goes unnoticed (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014, p. 18). Thus, I would argue that the example noted above is a decolonial act as they are unsettling DEPR's centralized power over what should be part of the curriculum and designing a *currículo vivo* that centers their *saberes* and lived experiences as a community. Today, you can trace the topics and subtopics included in the final *matriz curricular* to the backing paper that was hanging in the wall that day (Figure 4). While an analysis of curriculum is not within the scope of this research, I'll be making reference to these *pilares* and other parts of the curriculum as its content was reference across the interview as being a cause for contention between the community and the DEPR's hierarchy for their "approval." From a decolonial standpoint, this can be seen as a way to subjugated *el Caño*'s *saberes* and block those *saberes* from their experienced intergenerational community organizing work for *el dragado*, to be included in their educational project. I will further discuss this contention later in the text.

In an interview, Dr. MS explained how she contributed in the curriculum design along a group of students as part of a graduate doctoral seminar in curriculum from the UPR-Río Piedras Graduate Program in Curriculum and Instruction[14]. She further explained that their contribution revolved mostly around the need to adapt the curriculum to the DEPR's format requirements, particularly the *matrices curriculares*/curriculum matrix. While these *matrices* were a DEPR's requirement, Dr. MS and her students were aware of how important was to continue the curriculum design the community started with the *cinco pilares* and beyond. Dr. MS explained in interview:

> *el trabajo que nosotros hacemos en el curso con los estudiantes se monta, surge de ese reconocimiento de ese trabajo de base, de esos principios tal cual fueron definidos por los miembros de la comunidad y en los foros pertinente, y los principios que se aprobaron. Así que nosotros tomamos esa información y sobre esa información es que se desarrollan las matrices y se desarrolla el formato de las matrices.*/ the work that we did in the course with the students was mounted, arises from that recognition of that groundwork, of those principles as they were defined by the community members and in the relevant forums, and the principles that were approved. So, we took that information and on that information is that the *matrices* are developed and the format of the *matrices* were developed

While Dr. MS and the graduate students were bringing their expertise to the table, the responsiveness of their work to what specifically the G-8's needed to see *el sueño* come true speak to great *respeto el Caño*'s communities have earned across Puerto Rico's social fabric. This is also an example of how important is to approach community-academia partnerships with "*un gran respeto a ese trabajo comunitario de base*/ a great respect for [the] grassroots

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[14] The curriculum matrixes design for the educational project "*Escuela en Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*" was a collaborative effort between *Proyecto Enlace*, G-8, Inc., and University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras Campus, College of Education. Also, the following doctoral students from the *Currículo y Enseñanza en Teoría, Diseño y Evaluación Curricular* were part in this collaboration: Luz Betancourt Fuentes, Luis Collazo González, Rodolfo De Puzo Basanta, Marta Montañez Fernández y Sasha Montañez Correa. Their mentor was Dr. María Soledad. Any question related to the curriculum matrixes design can be send to: mariasoledad.martinez@upr.edu

community work" (Dr. MS, Interview) which centers the community's *saberes* and experiences by building on the community's work. In this particular case, centering the community's voices became more imperative as the community leadership have been fighting against the DEPR's intentions to maintain *el Caño*'s *saberes* and experiences out of the curriculum like it was noted above. Dr. MS and her students continued collaborating in the curriculum design building on the *cinco pilares* and the topics and subtopics from each of the *pilares* identified during the *mesas de trabajo* on the curriculum design. She further noted in an interview that they followed DEPR's curriculum framework along the work described above only to *el Caño* communities' reality.

"*CHOQUE IDEOLÓGICO*:" A CONTESTED CURRICULUM

Fitting the work done in *mesas de trabajo* around the curriculum with the DEPR's requirement represented a bureaucratic hurdle for the implementation of the community's curriculum. This major hurdle was the subterfuge DEPR's high hierarchy was resorting from to hold the implementation of a curriculum they considered too political. The fact that the curriculum was political was something the community leadership was not hiding and they explicitly noted during the interviews. For the G-8's leadership, having a curriculum about a "*liderazgo comunitario*[,]*de justicia social* [and] *de pensamiento crítico*" (AM, Interview) was something new in the DEPR.

One observable reason for the tensions around the curriculum implementation resides within the diametrically opposed curriculum discourse each part was aligned. In one hand, DEPR's notion of the curriculum dwelled on a conventionalist discourse (Scott, 2006), particularly the tradition of technical-instrumentalism (Moore & Young as cited in Scott, 2006). Scott (2006) summarize technical instrumentalist as a tradition concern to construct the curriculum around the needs to be a successful, efficient and knowledge-based economy (p. 34).

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For example, in *Ley de Reforma Educativa de Puerto* Rico/Puerto Rico's Act for Educational

Reform-Act 25-2018 in Art. 2.04.64, the Secretary of Education is bestow with the power to

"design and incorporate to the pubic education system's general curriculum, at all levels, school

activities and modules with the objective to expose students to the knowledge based economy"

(my translation). In other words, the educational reform (which also allows for charter schools

and school choice vouchers programs) stablish as a public policy that the curriculum framework

for all grade levels in the public school system should follow the technical instrumentalist trope

of preparing students to the "global, knowledge-based economy." Furthermore, the Secretary of

Education holds the power and the obligation by law to follow the said policy. The fact that one

person holds the power to determine what can be teach in the curriculum posed a grave threat to

community projects like the G-8's educational project and to democracy in general.

On the other side, as we have seen through the community curriculum deliberation

process, the G-8 leadership and *el Caño*'s residents aimed to bring to the curriculum ways to

empowered students to be agent of change in their communities and in the wider society. As

noted above, the way the community defined the curriculum purpose aligned more to a critical

pedagogical framework. This framework aims to enact the curriculum "through pedagogic means

to surface and in the process disrupt conventional forms of understanding which serve to

reproduce undemocratic, racist, sexist, and unequal social relations" (Scott, 2006, p. 39). In clear

contrast with DEPR's public policy, which is grounded on conventionalist tradition of

individualistic neoliberal ideology, the curriculum designed for *Liderazgo y transformación*

social prioritized the collective. For instance, as part of the main theme of *Comunidad* in the

curriculum, *Comunidad* definition include the following:

> *El principio de comunidad se define como 'el sentimiento de pertenencia a un colectivo*
> *unido por relaciones interpersonales (relaciones de confianza, convivencia, respeto y*

compromiso entre sus miembros), intereses comunes y una visión de futuro compartida'/The principle of community is defined as 'the feeling of belonging to a group united by interpersonal relationships (relationships of trust, coexistence, respect and commitment among its members), common interests and a shared vision of the future.

This definition of *comunidad* is based on the leadership experience in building community power thanks in great part to the sense of belonging shared among residents across the eight communities. Meanwhile, the DEPR's policy was centralizing what knowledge should be include in the curriculum and to what interests that knowledge should respond.

The community leadership and other collaborators interviewed agreed that these tensions were based on ideological nature. This is also noted in the example above. In an interview, Enlace's social worker MR, described the nature of the tensions between the community leadership and the DEPR when he was collaborating in the curriculum design. He further explained:

> *Creo que [las tensiones eran] de naturaleza ideológica. El departamento educación es un botín de guerra en términos de intereses económicos y de la política partidista en Puerto Rico.*/I think that [tensions were] ideological in nature. The DOE is a war booty in economic terms and political interest in Puerto Rico.

The last part of MR's remarks brings into the discussion the role of political parties in the curriculum ideological tug war. First, MR's comments on the DEPR being a "*botín de guerra*" capture how the political parties manage the department. To give an example, after the government of the ousted governor Ricardo Rosselló took charge religious groups and politician aligned with them pushed for the derogation of the inclusion of education with a gender-based perspective in the public schools' curriculum. As soon as Julia Keleher replaced Rafael Román, Senator Thomas Rivera Schatz made the Keleher's confirmation as Secretary of Education contingent to the derogation of the said curriculum policy. It was expected that Julia Keleher would cede to the political and religious pressure. The opportunity to have a justice-oriented

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pedagogical practice in Puerto Rico's school curriculum was stopped by the necro politics of a colonial administration in a moment of history where the lives of trans, and women are in constant jeopardy due to *violencia machista* and transphobia. It can be argued that the same necro politics of the colonial administration that were pushing for eradication of gender-perspective lens in public schools, also operated in the no implementation of the curriculum in leadership and social transformation.

The examples noted above can help us understand how the ideological tensions between the community leadership and DEPR around the curriculum. Therefore, should not be a surprise that the *educación política* that the community leadership was bringing into the curriculum would be contested by DEPR's authorities. As noted above, the community leadership wanted to bring political education to develop the next generation of community leaders in *el Caño*. MR described further:

> *Aquí lo que se estaba planteando con esta escuela no es otra cosa que un taller de radicalización desde las primeras etapas de la formación de los niños. Que los niños pudieran decidir, pudieran estar involucrados con la comunidad. Que fueran [parte] del desarrollo de ese liderato crítico en un país bajo dominación colonial Pues imagínate (ríe) la amenaza que eso representa [para la administración colonial]./* Here what was being considered with this school is nothing other than a workshop of radicalization from the first stages of the children's formation. That children could decide, be involved with the community. That they could be [part of] the development of that critical leadership in a country under colonial domination. Imagine the threat it represents [for the colonial administration].

The reaction of the colonial administration in the DEPR, I would argue, is due to the community's decolonial actions to design a curriculum with a pedagogical approach that was built on their transformative community organizing work (Baquedano-López et. al., 2014, p. 18). For MR, and AC agreed separately, the DEPR saw the *formación política* of children as a *amenaza*/threat, as they would critically look at the structures that are oppressing their communities and what actions are needed to transform them, including the discriminatory

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substandard education. For the DEPR and the G-8 it was clear that this educational project was disrupting the hegemonic public educational system in Puerto Rico through a curriculum that was centering how organized communities could bring change to their immediate environment, including schools.

AC noted during interview how the community leadership aimed to bring a *formación política* so young people could have an active participation as member of the community and wider society to demand for their rights before any institution or politician. Here is where it lays the *radicalización* MR was referring to. To put it bluntly, having a curriculum where young people could become informed and empowered citizen to organize and build power to affect change in their society, and in Puerto Rico's case a colony, was a menace for the DEPR. The DEPR's role then was to maintain the status quo in terms for political and intersubjective relationship. For instance, DEPR's Social Studies curriculum framework focus their civic education on the idea of developing "responsible, laborious and enterprising citizen" which limit their actions to "to analyze issues of concern, exercise the right to vote, and otherwise influence government policy, especially on those issues that concern the people and the welfare of future generations"(DEPR, 2016, p. 3, my translation). I find this idea to align with the civic republican framework of citizenship that continue to dominate the citizenship discourse in schools curriculum (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). According to the authors, "in civic republican discourse, 'responsibility' is often set up against 'rights'" (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006, p. 660).

As a result, the DEPR's agents oversighting the community curriculum design kept pushing back against any reference to critical perspective. MR named it "*la batalla de los conceptos*"/concepts battle: "*Todos los conceptos que involucraran movilización social […], a lucha [social], a perspectivas críticas. Todo del saque [el DEPR decía] 'bórrame eso del*

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[currículo]'"/Every concept that had to do with social movement, [social] struggle, critical

perspectives. Everything from the beggining [the DEPR said] 'take that off [of the curriculum]'.

This contention exemplify the nuances of the *choque ideológico* which led both parties to

negotiate what concept should be part of the curriculum. To reiterate, the work that result from

the curriculum deliberation and the *diálogo de saberes* that took place during the *mesas de*

trabajo was important to build the curriculum. Therefore, by pushing back against the concepts

brought by community members DEPR's was undermining *el Caño*'s *saberes* and their lived

experiences as a community which historically have fought for their and trying to make the

curriculum more attuned with the official discourse and "*aguar el proyecto lo más*

possible"/water down the educational project as much as possible (MR, interview). MR further

explained:

> *me refiero a despolitizarlo lo más posible porque esto era un proyecto ideológico*
> *político lo que se estaba montando. Ideológico-político en el buen sentido de la palabra.*
> *Que los jóvenes estuvieran conscientes de su condición de clase, condición como*
> *puertorriqueño/a, conscientes de los issues de su comunidad.*/ I mean depoliticize it as
> much as possible because this was a political ideological project that was being set up.
> Ideological-political in the good sense of the word. That the young people were aware of
> their class condition, their condition as Puerto Ricans, aware of the issues of their
> community

Yet again, this is a clear example of the role of a state-sanctioned public education system that

play a crucial role in maintaining the unequal social, political and material conditions in the

wider society. This is no surprise as the DEPR is following their historical social role in the

colony of reproducing social and cultural inequities through schooling (Césaire, 2010). To

further illustrate DEPR's motivation in *aguar*/water down G-8's educational project, MR

recounted in interview how the community had to fight to maintain the name *Caño Martín Peña*

in the curriculum because the DEPR needed to replicable it in other communities. This of course

was not negotiable for the community leadership.

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The *choque ideológico* around the *batalla de conceptos* between both parties further illustrate how curriculum-making is a contested activity (Scott, 2006). One might also say that it is also a terrain/object of contestation as its content, the communities that are represented and how histories are told in the curriculum are shape by ideologies in constant confrontation to hold power (Cruz, 2012, p. 464). Thereby, the curriculum holds the power to transform the geopolitical space in schools, the intersubjective relationship at the school and wider society, the same way coloniality operates in the world system.

Summary

In this section I presented the community participatory work in the design of a curriculum for the school in *Liderazgo y Transformación Social en el Caño Martían Peña*. Community leadership along residents and other collaborators engaged in the curriculum design that would fostered a *pensamiento crítico* among young people in school classroom so students can find the tools to "analyze and interpret the socio-historical context where they live and develop" (Collaborative Agreement, my translation). As this process was aiming to decolonized being, knowledge and power within the official curriculum (Cruz, 2012; Maldonado-Torres, 2016), the curriculum became a contested object in the G8-DEPR's collaboration. The DEPR saw the *formación política* of children as a *amenaza*/threat, as the curriculum would support students to critically examine the structures that are oppressing their communities and what actions are needed to transform them, including the discriminatory substandard education.

BUILDING A COLLABORATION WITH A CENTRALIZED DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In this section I show how the efforts led by the leadership in building a collaboration with DEPR's high hierarchy were stablishing a new paradigm in the school-community

relationships of Puerto Rico public school system. G -8's collaboration agreement with the

Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR) started during the last year of Secretary Rafael

Roman's tenure in order to implement the educational project to *transformar la educación* in *el*

Caño. It is important to understand that this collaborative agreement was an initiative from the

G-8's leadership as part of their community work to transform *el Caño*. Furthermore, this

collaboration was establishing a precedent in the middle of a discriminatory policy of school

closure, which was also implemented in *el Caño* without the community consent. Nevertheless,

this agreement was a step forward to contest the *pobre educación* young people had to navigate

and to decolonized the community-school relations in *el Caño*.

    After laying the guidelines for the educational project, the leadership contacted the

DEPR's leadership to discuss and explain the G-8's educational project and why it was important

for *el Caño*'s communities. One of the points of discussion was the possibility of establishing a

collaboration with the DEPR to move forward the educational project. For the community

leadership having an initial agreement with Secretary Rafael Román was key as general elections

were about to take place and a change in the administration could delay the educational project

initiation. Similarly, they were aware of the great influence political partisanship have in Puerto

Rico's government agencies and particularly the DEPR. That is why the community leadership

was thinking in building an agreement with the agency that they could leverage in the eventuality

of a change in DEPR's leadership and in their meetings with politicians running for office.

Figure 4.

Timeline of the events that took place as part of G8-DEPR's collaboration.

June 2016	*Colectivo Educativo* laid down the guidelines for educational project *La Escuela que Queremos*
G-8 met with DEPR's Secretary Rafael Román to build a collaborative agreement	June 30, 2016
December 1st, 2016	*Diálogo-Talleres* with *el Caño's* residents and school community started
Signing of the collaborative agreement between G-8, Inc. and DEPR's Secretary Rafael Román	December 16, 2016
January 2017	G-8, Inc. met with new DEPR's Administration to follow up on the collaborative agreement signed with the previous administration
Mesas de Trabajo on Curriculum Design started	May 2017
August 2017	*Escuela Especializada en Liderazgo y Transformación Social* was inaugurated
Huracán María	September 2017
Mayo 2018	Dr. María Soledad and Graduate Students started to work on the *Matrices Curriculares*
G-8 leadership informed parents and the community that the educational project will not continue in the school	September 2019

The leadership wanted to make sure the Secretary was aware of the educational barrier youths from *el Caño* have had to navigate in schools. During that meeting, AC was emphatic in pointing out that their experience with the community's education programs have told them the great need young people were facing due to the "*educación pobre*" they are receiving in *la escuela pública tradicional*/traditonal public school. In this meeting, the G-8 and Enlace's leadership were engaging in a decolonial act in a space from where the knowledge system of schools originates by noting how the *escuela tradicional* have failed to *el Caño*'s youths in supporting them. Together, they are presenting their vision of la "*escuela que queremos*" based on their community's knowledge systems (*Saberes*) and lived experiences (*vivencias*) with *escuela tradicional*.

This epistemic disobedience did not fall in activism as the next day the G-8 leadership move forward with the discussion of what should be included in the agreement with the DEPR. The efforts led by G-8's leadership in building the collaborative agreement is drawing from their experience during the participatory planning process in designing a just developmental plan for *el Caño*'s communities. In this case their participation in building a collaboration to bring educational change to a school passed by a centralized Department of Education whom did not invite them and which have implemented neoliberal policies and school closure in their communities. The educational change they wanted to see in their communities would not come from the highest office in educational matters but from their organizing work. Therefore, *el Caño*'s community leadership moved on creating the conditions to turn the table by bringing their organizing work experience and presenting possible solutions to the educational system that have discriminate young people because of where they live.

I would suggest that the actions from the community leadership to *transformar la educación* are at the same time decolonial actions in the form of epistemic disobedience as they are centering the *saberes* of community organizers about what kind of education *el Caño*'s young people deserved. What is more, as a community organization they were reclaiming an active participation to transform a public institution that as a centralized state agency have enacted policies and practices that further server the community school relationships. For example, after hurricane María parents from *el Caño* had to take the streets to demand the opening of schools in their communities. The DEPR's actions after the traumatic experience of a hurricane and having closed five schools in the special district alone speaks to the inhumane approach the agency has adopted towards the families of *el Caño*. It is with this backdrop, nevertheless, that the G-8's leadership move forward to build *el sueño de la escuela que queremos*.

Before the agreement of collaboration was presented to the DEPR's Secretary Román, the community leadership started a series *diálogo-talleres* to have *el Caño*'s residents, children and leadership to discuss what the collaborative educational project to be proposed to the DEPR's leadership. This agreement was later ratified by residents from the eight communities and later signed by Secretary Rafael Román and then G-8's President CF on December 15, 2016. The DEPR's bureaucracy let the community waited after the administration he was working for lost the elections, to have the community signing the agreement. In an interview, EQ recounted how Rafael Román "*fue dando largas y largas y ya a última hora vino y lo firmó*" (was dragging his feet and waited until last minute to signed it). For the community this was playing at their favor as they could leverage the signed collaborative agreement with the incoming administration. But, having to work with a new administration was like starting over again.

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TENSIONS WITHIN THE G8-DEPR COLLABORATION

This section aims to understand the efforts from community leadership in maintaining the agreement of collaboration with the DEPR leadership for the implementation of the community's curriculum in an elementary local school. At the same time, I present how these efforts were contested by the DEPR leadership at the central and school level, and how they resorted from the bureaucratic apparatus to impede the implementation of the curriculum. The community leaders and collaborators interviewed during this project identified forms of power struggle between different components of the public education system in Puerto Rico. These are, the DEPR's high hierarchy, the school principal and teachers. In what follows, I present how the G8-DEPR's collaboration evolved in a contentious relationship, impeding the educational project to materialized.

I argue, that the centralized power and the *política partidista* in DEPR's colonial administration were important forces that jeopardized the G-8's educational project. The lack of support at the school level also played a role in hindering the implementation of the curriculum after the program in leadership and social transformation was inaugurated.

Tensions with DEPR's colonial administration

After signing the collaborative agreement with DEPR under the administration of Rafael Román, the G-8's leadership sent a letter welcoming Julia Keleher as the new Secretary of Education in the administration of the ousted governor Ricardo Rosselló. In that letter, the leadership described to the new Secretary how after years of community work for the betterment of *el Caño*'s communities it was important for them to "*crear espacios de educación transformadora que vayan a la par con los trabajos de Desarrollo social que realizamos.*" (cite letter). They further explained how important was for G-8's leadership to count with the full

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support of from the DEPR to move forward the participatory educational project for a school in leadership and social transformation. Nevertheless, with a new administration in power the leadership were facing one of the major obstacles they were trying to avoid with the educational project, *política partidista*/partisanship.

It was a consensus among the community leadership that participate in forging the collaboration that the DEPR educational leadership under the new government was determined to stop the community of having the school they sought to have. For example, the then DEPR's second in command, Eligio Hernández, was the first person in the new administration to meet with G-8 and Enlace's leadership who immediately started to questioned why the agency should support the community educational project if the collaborative agreement was part of the "past administration." His position reflected how the *política partidista* was one of the hurdles the community leadership knew beforehand that would hinder their work to construct "*espacios para una educación transformadora*" in *el Caño*'s schools. That is why since the conception of the idea about the school, *el Colectivo* stated that the educational plan should not be subject to the *política partidista*. The centralized power hold by the DEPR and the fact that political parties in power saw the agency as a *botín de guerra*/war booty, further weakened the collaborative agreement with the community leadership.

In an interview, AC describe how the DEPR leadership was more of a "*obstaculizador*" rather than a "*facilitador*" in the process of the implementation. Going back to that meeting with ten sub-Secretary of Education, Eligio Hernández, AC narrated in an interview how during that first meeting there was a *carreo* (face to face) between the G-8's leadership and Eligio Hernández when in the middle of their schools project's presentation the Sub-Secretary started to questioned the focus on leadership and the philosophy behind the curriculum. In that moment of

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confrontation Hernández was coming from a standpoint of using his "expertise" in curriculum, which he was sure to tell the leadership about. Meanwhile, the G-8's leadership was coming from a participatory experience in the *Dialogo-talleres* where they brought their *saberes* to build the educational project for their communities. The G-8's leadership was not asking for their input about their work. They were emphatic about that there was a work that the community has done and they were inviting the DEPR to be part of that work. From a decolonial standpoint, this speak to how the G-8's leadership were repositioning their knowledge that have been subjugated by the politics of the colonial administration in schools. Simultaneously, this decolonial act in itself was problematic for the people in power to maintain the material conditions of the colonial project in schools.

While the relations with the DEPR's leadership continued after this event, it marked the fate of the relationship between the G-8 and the DEPR in this emerging collaboration. As one of the social workers that collaborate in the curriculum design process described in an interview, during the meetings between G-8 and the new administration, "the community leadership felt like they were walking in a tightrope" (MR, Interview). From this moment on every request and action from the community leadership was well thought out in order to not jeopardize the educational project that costed so much to the community.

The tensions between the community leadership and the DEPR are a result of the centralized power the leadership holds in dictating the educational policies. At the same time, these policies are grounded on the deficit narrative that families and communities are responsible for students' failure therefore they should not be involved in bringing change to the educational system because they are not the "experts" but the "root of the problem." As the collaboration continued, the communications from G-8 and Enlace were being ignored by sub-Secretary

Hernández. For G-8's leadership these actions from DEPR's leadership was sending the message to them that "*no nos aceptaban*" (LC, Interview).

After two years as Secretary of Education and having a federal investigation on her due a controversial DEPR's contracts, Julia Keleher stepped down in April 2nd, 2019. After two months of Keleher's resignation, Eligio Hernández was installed as the new Secretary of Education. The appointment of Hernández as Secretary of Education came after two year of the inauguration of school in leadership and social transformation. Furthermore, even with the curriculum submitted to the DEPR's Specialized Schools Division and with teachers been trained on the implementation of the curriculum, thanks to the work of G-8's allies, the schoolteachers were not teaching the curriculum on leadership and social transformation. This situation was further severing the collaboration and now the person in charge of the DEPR's was the same person that epitomized the *politica partidista* in the agency.

In an interview, AC recounted how the now Secretary Eligio Hernández during the first meeting with the G-8's leadership, told the leadership: [mocking Eligio] '*yo les dije a ustedes desde el día que nos reunimos, se acuerda Sr. Cotté, que lo que empieza mal termina mal, yo le dije tal cosa, tal cosa.*' […] *Me sigues. Y ahora de posición de Secretario, ¿tú crees que esta persona iba a colaborar?*'. Other *testimonio* from G-8's president LC, narrated in an interview that Hernández referred to their educational project as a *natimuerto* project. Now in the position of Secretary of Education, Eligio Hernández was behaving like a bully against the community leadership. The language used by Hernández was aiming to diminish what the *el Caño* community have accomplished as social agents of change. Moreover, by holding more power as the new Secretary he was simultaneously positioning the school knowledge system on top of the curriculum and subjugating to a greater extent *el Caño's* communities *saberes*.

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The expression of "*natimuerto*" used by Secretary Eligio Hernández reminded me of Freire's description of the authoritarian practices in education. Freire (1998) stated that an "authoritarian is afraid of freedom, to eagerness, to uncertainty, to doubt and to dream, and he opt for immobilism" (My translation). He adds, "there's a lot of necrophiliac in authoritarianism" (my translation). By referencing to the project as *natimuerto*, Secretary Hernández was claiming "victory" over the community and letting them know that he was holding the authority while at the same time manifesting his necrophilia towards an education that is cemented in the non-life of coloniality.

Tensions within community-school relations

As part of the educational project, G-8 and Enlace aimed to foster real community participation in school matters where parents and residents could be part of the decision making. This participatory approach was taking from their experience in their community organizing work for *el Caño*'s *dragado*. As for the school leadership and faculty, this was something they were not willing to cede easily. It could be said that the diametrically opposed stances result in tensions with the school community that hindered the curriculum implementation and the eventual G-8's withdraw from the educational project agreement. While teachers and the principal did not participate in this project, in this section I discuss the tensions between the G-8's leadership and the school community. Looking at these tensions is a way to normalize the tensions and conflict that are part of building collaborations (Gold, et. al., 2002, p. 39). At the same time, it helps to highlight the reconfiguration in community-school relation G-8's leadership was aiming to transform in order to move forward the educational project.

According to Warren (2005) strong relationships based on trust and cooperation among stakeholders in community-school relations "can play an important role in improving schools in

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several ways" (p. 137). One form to build those strong relationships is through relational power (Warren et. al., 2011). From an organizing stance and drawing from feminism and theological traditions, Warren and colleagues understand relational power in organizing as "power 'with' others or building power to accomplish common aims" (p. 27). This form of relationship building is developed by fostering a sense of mutuality and shared goals to transform educational contexts (Warren et. al., 2011). Unfortunately, the G-8's relationship with the principal was the opposite leading to the raised of tensions between them. Warren and colleagues refer to this form of power relation within the organizing work as "power 'over' others" (Warren et. al. 2011, p. 27). For example, although the educational project aligned with the community organizing work the lack of institutional support from DEPR's led G-8's leadership to take the decision along parents and communities to withdraw collaborative agreement. DEPR's decision of no collaborating speak of how they maintained the unilateral power relation by the centralized colonial administration instead of foregrounding the collective future for young people envisioned by community (Patel, 2016).

Parents-Community-Principal Tensions. Since the first meeting with former Secretary Rafael Román the leadership was gauging the possibility of changing the principal from the school they wanted to start the educational project. According to the minute of that meeting, they were told by Román that as Secretary he was not legally able to remove the school principal and was up to the community leadership to sell the project to the principal if they wanted to count with her support. This was a challenge for the community leadership because the relationship between the principal and the community hosting the school was not healthy. For example, LC explained in an interview how even after the agreement of collaboration was signed with Secretary Rafael Román in 2016, and having reached some agreement with the subsequent

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Secretaries, the school principal was reluctant to lead the educational project along the community leadership in the school. For the leadership not having an ally in the local school leadership was another hurdle for the curriculum implementation.

For AC, the school leadership was not prepared to work with the community in their project. AC explained in an interview: "*La Directora no creí en el proyecto porque la hacía trabajar de una manera diferente*" (The school principal did not believe in the Project because it made her to work in a different way.) By this AC was noting how the school leadership was aligned with the *escuela tradicional* and were not open not open to the possibility of collaborating with the community in a project that would disrupt "what they [the school] know." Literature on cross-sector collaborative experiences have shown how the asymmetrical power relations between principal and community partners can hinder authentic partnerships to bring educational change to schools (Auerbach, 2010; Ishimaru, 2019; Khalifa, 2012). This asymmetrical relation was taking place in the form of unilateral power.

In another interview AM, President of *Junta Comunitaria de la Comunidad Las Monjas* (community where the school is located) recounted that while she was working in the curriculum project in one the *mesas de trabajo* (discussion tables) named *Comunidad*, parents expressed their concerns and frustration on the lack of communication between them and the principal office.

> *Una de las quejas que decían los papás [era] que ellos no tenían ningún tipo de contacto con la directora. O ella nunca estaba, o no los podía recibir. Pero ellos no tenían ese contacto con la directora*/Parents grievances revolve around principal neglect and lack of communication. (AM, Interview)

The principal relationship with parents denotes the deficit approach from the school leadership in regard to parents' involvement in their children education. This approach results from the unilateral power relations between the school leadership and the community as a whole

which at the same time brought these unresolved tensions to the efforts of collaboration into the educational project.

For this reason, AM explained in an interview that as part of the educational project the G-8 and Enlace's leadership were aiming to take action and make their voices heard to change this situation. Even though the DEPR's policies on parent involvement allowed to some limited participation, AM further narrated that in conversation with parents and families during the *mesa de trabajo* on *Comunidad* they wanted to reposition parents and community involvement in the educational experience of *el Caño*'s children in schools: "*Y eso, nosotros queríamos cambiar eso. Nosotros queríamos que los padres estuvieran en la escuela, que fueran parte de un proceso donde se escogiera el director, los maestros.*" This in itself was a decolonial possibility as it would unsettle where the power in decision making is located by empowering parents and community members to exert real power as stakeholders on the education of *el Caño*'s children.

One particular case I believe illustrates the tensions between the G-8 and the school due to the initiatives to transform the school is the creation of *Casa Comunitaria* (insert picture). *Casa Comunitaria* was a classroom that was refurbished through the economic collaboration from G-8's allies in the banking industry with the purpose of having a space where students, parents and community members could participate in *talleres* (educational programs) sponsored by G-8 and Enlace. For example, AM explained in an interview that one of the *talleres* to be offered in *Casa Comunitaria* was designed by the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico for parents that were interested in taking college credits in humanities, philosophy, and political sciences. At the same time, having this space within the school premises allowed for the G-8 and the community in general to have a strong presence so they could be aware of concerns parents were facing in school. According to LC, the school principal and the faculty found a way to push

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the G-8's *Casa Comunitaria* program out of the school. In an interview LC described how they experienced the incident:

> *Creamos la Casa Comunitaria que era un lugar donde los papás podían dar quejas de algo que estaba pasando en la escuela. Y eso ellos no lo veían bien. Tan es así que empezaron a empujar de que querían ese espacio de la Casa Comunitaria porque necesitaban de repente un teatro. Entiendes, con un montón de salones por allá, pero ese era el que querían. Claro, lo habíamos habilitado, le habíamos puesto aire acondicionado, le habíamos reparado ventanas. Y entonces empezaron a empujar.*/ We created the Community House which was a place where parents could complain about something that was happening at the school. And that they didn't see right. So much so that they started pushing that they wanted that Community House space because they suddenly needed a theater. You know, with a lot of classrooms over there, but that's what they wanted. Of course, we had set it up, we had put in air conditioning, we had repaired windows. And then they started pushing us out.

The fact that the school leadership "*no veían bien*" (they didn't see well) that parents could share their concerns related to school in a space outside the principal's office exemplify the tensions between the G-8 and both the principal and school faculty. The G-8 and parents' actions to reclaim a space for them to be present and participate actively in school hours was part of the educational project to transform the school. The expropriation of *Casa Comunitaria* by the principal was to let the community know that the school authorities were still holding power and that the community should not be part of the educational process of their children. The G-8's leadership were aware that in order to move forward their educational project they needed power, power they did not have.

Community-Teachers Tensions. AC said in an interview that even though G-8 and Enlace were finding the resources for the school, and for teacher professional development they did not have the power. The fact that the power at the institutional level was centralized became the major hurdle in moving forward the educational project. Nevertheless, the kind of power the community wanted was relational power (Warren, 2005) which would let them to be part of the process of decision making in the school and work along the school staff.

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AC further noted in an interview how teachers were aware of the power struggle: "*¿Qué decían los maestros? 'ellos quieren mandar.' Y la comunidad no es que quiera mandar. La comunidad quiere tomar decisiones, ser parte de la toma de decisiones*/What did the teachers say? 'They want to run things. And the community did not want to be in charge. The community wants to make decisions, to be part of the decision making." For teachers the community educational project was seem like a menace to the way they do things at school and to the power they hold in the way they teach children. The G-8's leadership response to the allegations from the faculty was that the only thing they wanted to do is being part of the decision making. Nonetheless, for G-8's leadership having a faculty and school principal against of having the community participating in the decision-making process was nonsense and a "*barrera*" (LC, Interview) to ensure the implementation of the curriculum they designed.

The teachers' reaction to the role of the community in the educational project contrast with the participatory approach the community stablished when they invited the local school to collaborate in the project. In that vein, teachers agreed to be part in the design of the curriculum and workshops for the professional development they needed to implement the curriculum. Some teachers participate of the curriculum design, and at least one was very active in the process. This teacher was the school liaison and curriculum coordinator in leadership and social transformation. However, AC explained in an interview that during the professional development workshops some teachers felt that the new curriculum was more work on top of the work they were doing.

> *Así que los maestros y maestras también, en aquel momento, llegaron a un acuerdo de trabajo pero hubo un momento en que sintieron, cuando comenzaron a traer los recursos y acompañarlos, pensaron: ah! Espérate. Aquí me van hacer trabajar mas. O aquí van a cambiarme esto, o aquí perdemos el poder, me van a sacar la directora'*/ So the teachers also, at that time, agreed to collaborate but there was a moment when we began to bring the resources and accompany them, they thought: "Wait. Here they are going to put

more work on me." Either, "they [the community] are going to change this, or we are going to lose our power, they are going to take the principal away."

For the community leadership, teachers were worried that by having a person from the community or a G-8's ally to support them in the process of the curriculum implementation was taking power out of their hand. According to the leadership, teachers expressed that they did not want any person out of school with them in their classroom. LC further explained in an interview:

> *[los maestros decían:] "Ok ustedes nos dieron el currículo, ahora nosotros seguimos."*
> *Entonces decíamos: Pero si esto es una escuela de la comunidad, con un currículo*
> *creado por la comunidad ¿Por qué la comunidad no está? ¿Por qué ellos no permiten*
> *que la comunidad participe? Y no es que estemos en los salones metidos porque eso no es*
> *la labor de ninguno de nosotros. Se le estaba dando herramientas tanto a los maestros*
> *como a la directora. Se consiguieron coaching para ellos, verdad, que los apoyaran en*
> *un proceso porque es un proceso innovador. Pero no funcionaba así. La mentalidad es*
> *una mentalidad de educación regular*/[teachers were saying:] "Ok you gave us the
> curriculum, now we move on." So we were saying: But if this is a community school,
> with a curriculum created by the community, why isn't the community there? Why don't
> they allow the community to participate? And it's not like we're in the classrooms in the
> middle of it because that's not the job of any of us. The teachers and the principal were
> being given tools. We got coaching to support them in a process because it's an
> innovative process. But it didn't work like that. The mentality is a traditional education.

The teachers' decision to maintain the community outside of the classroom can be interpreted differently and unfortunately the perspective of teachers was missing in this project. Having the stories from the community as my main refence to interpretate the teacher's role in community-school collaboration leave me questioning, what are other possible causes of the tensions between teachers and community leadership in the context of the educational project? Considering that relationship building with school staff is one of the important goals in community-school collaborations, is important to attend the barriers that might hinder to achieve the relation between teachers and community organizations. Gold and colleagues point at the "professional culture that define parents and communities as support of professionals rather than

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as collaborators in designing and carrying out children's education" (Gold et. al., 2002, p. 38) as the first cause to hinder the relationship building. In the same vein, Warren (2005) explains that teachers might feel wary of working together CBOs as they fear the demands from parents and communities' demand as an intrusion to their professional sphere (p. 138). Hence, the teachers' expression "you gave us the curriculum, now we take it from here" was a way to keep the G-8's leadership and the community out of the professional sphere.

The G-8's leadership wanted to be for the school more than a "go-to" to solve school's immediate needs which was the kind of relationship the school was fostering with the community. For example, EQ narrated how the G-8 and Enlace responded to every request the school leadership made for school activities like the field day: "*Lo de ellos fue todo el tiempo pedir y nosotros nunca le fallamos, nosotros siempre le dimos. Se gastaron como creo que $85 mil dólares [en la escuela]. Pedían guagua [para excursiones]. Lo que no le daba el Departamento anyway*" (They were always asking us for help and we never said no. We were always there for them. I think we invested almost $85,000.00 [in that school]. They asked for transportation for students [we provided]. We gave them what the DEPR was not giving them). According to AC, these were examples of how the local school saw G-8 and Enlace as "*colaboradores a su proyecto*" (collaborators to the school project) and "*no al proyecto de la comunidad*" (not to the community's project) (AC, Interview)

If the community was collaborating and using the social capital to invest in the school, why teachers decided not to collaborate with the community in their educational project? More important, why after agreeing Clearly, this question can fully be answered by talking to teachers. Nevertheless, based on the other experience scholars have reported on similar situations regarding teachers' stances when new curriculum is introduced in classrooms can help to shed

light on this particular tension. For instance, research on teachers' influence on science curriculum implementation have shown how teachers' belief about teaching and learning and their network have a strong effect in the outcome of the implementation (Roehrig et al., 2007; Van Driel et al., 2001). For instance, teachers might feel disempowerment by the imposition of curriculum and teaching practices from centralized system like DEPR (Warren et al., 2011, p. 28), increasing the tensions when new educational change are proposed in their classrooms. Similarly, in the context of educational organizing, "many teachers may not know what communities are demanding" while "organizing groups have to win over their heart and mind" (Warren et al., 2011, p. 27).

In the case of G-8's educational project, the leadership worked toward building a relational power with teachers through the curriculum design and the professional development as a way to win their hearts and minds. It is worth to note that, while the community leadership pointed at teachers as playing a key role in the unsuccessful curriculum implementation, from an organizing stance G-8's work major focus was on the accountability of DEPR's school leadership to the community (Renée & McAlister, 2011, p. 41). Thus, I would argue that the unilateral power from DEPR's high hierarchy and the lack of commitment from the school principal won over the relational power the community leadership was trying to build with all stakeholders, including teachers.

The school's (re)actions towards the educational project that started from and for *el Caño*'s communities speaks to the unsettling process the G-8 and Enlace engaged in bring change to the school. The G-8 and Enlace's community work experiences, and the knowledge and empowerment the leadership recovered through these experiences, did not find room in an institution where the power was held by those entitled by the DEPR's to "encourage the

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participation of parents [and community members] in the school's educational activities" (G8-DEPR's Collaborative Agreement, 2016). The community leadership found incongruent that teachers and principal at the school level were not enforcing the public policy of community schools that was included in the collaboration agreement. In the agreement it was explicitly stated that:

> in relation to the community it serves, [Act 149-1999] stipulates that the school should collaborate in the analysis and offer alternatives that can be used in the solution of the problems of the school community; encourage the participation of parents in the school's educational activities (…)(my translation)

The public policy on community schools allowed for parents to participate on School Councils and it gave schools the autonomy to develop curriculum and educational activities that better fit the need the communities they served. However, at the school level the vision teachers and the principal had was a deficit one where the school is the center of the community and community member and parents are there to help with the school when they are needed.

This paradox of having a policy that allow schools to collaborate with community and families along with a signed agreement between the highest DEPR's authority but not letting the community to enact the curriculum they designed connects to how teachers and school administrators have assimilated the authoritarianism that centralized educational systems like the DEPR. This authoritarianism neglects any policy or initiative that come from other form of knowledge outside of the school. For AC, this is grounded in a "*prejuicio hacia la comunidad, ¿que la comunidad decida y enseñe? No. Tienes que tener un doctorado de Harvard u otro para [hablar de educación]*" (Interview). The lived experiences and the knowledge that circulates in *el Caño* among residents that want to contribute to the transformation of their education, were dismissed by school authorities because of the "*prejuicio hacia la comunidad.*" These *prejuicios hacia la comunidad* are also grounded in the historical marginalization *el Caño* have experienced

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since the first community was founded along the margins of the mangroves. This discrimination comes from the former criminalization towards the families that first came to *el Caño*, it come from the eradication policy of "*arrabales*", it comes from the xenophobia towards the Dominican diaspora in Puerto Rico, it comes from the elitists and classist political establishment, and it comes from *los grandes intereses* that have always *puesto un ojo* on the land the *abuelos* have created so their future generations could have a place they could call *comunidad*.

It was clear for the community leadership that they could not bring a *transformación en la educación* if they do not have the autonomy needed from the DEPR to move forward their educational project. As it was showed above, the central and local hurdles the community leadership faced in the school revolve around who holds the power and who can participate in the decision making for the design of educational activities. For the G-8's and Enlace leadership their patience and energy was short and they wanted to see the children and youths participating in their project to became *líderes* in the *transformación social* of *el Caño* and Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, for the G-8's leadership the unresolved tensions with the school's principal and faculty result in the no implementation of their curriculum.

LA LUCHA SIGUE

After experiencing all the *atropellos* from the DEPR, the community leadership took the hard decision of withdrawing the educational project from the school. The illusion of having a public school with a *currículo vivo, del barrio* to develop a new generation of social leaders for the community and Puerto Rico was shattered. Nevertheless, the G-8's leadership continued to explore other venues to have *la escuela que queremos*. At the time of the interviews there was nothing concrete but they were hopeful to see their school open for *le Caño*'s young people.

The G-8 and Enlace identified a school that was closed by the DEPR austerity policies which as a public space became part of *el Caño*'s land trust. This school would be home of the *Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*. They expected to serve small groups of young people from middle school ages. Additionally, the community leadership planned to resort from the social capital they have built across the years to fund their educational project. This way they can run the institution as a no-tuition private school independent from the DEPR.

So, one might wonder, why they did not start from there in the first place? AC answer that question in an interview and told me:

> *Nosotros quisimos hacerlo dentro del Estado, porque el Estado tiene una fucking responsabilidad aquí, y creemos en la escuela pública. Pero si el sistema está…, tan corroído y no hay una estructura, verdad, que permita este tipo de trabajo, pues claro va a ser mucho mas duro.*/We wanted to do it within the state, because the state has a fucking responsibility here, and we believe in the public school. But if the system is..., so corroded and there's no structure, right, that allows this kind of work, then of course it's going to be much harder.

For the community leadership the public goods should serve the people's needs and it was in hand of the people to take those spaces back to the community. But as we saw through this chapter, and AC stated, the corroded and corrupted colonial system of the DEPR would first see how young people continued to have low literacy in order to hold onto power. As for the Secretary Eligio Hernández, AM was sure to speak truth to him by recalling him that his days were numbered but they would be there building a new educational future for their children and youths.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

During the Summer 2016 I started to learn from the community organizing work Enlace and G-8 were doing with *el Caño*'s youth through the youth leadership program, LIJAC. One of the interests guiding that project at that time was to understand if young leaders found in school any support to their community work. This research project opened the door to collaborate with part of Enlace and community leadership and it later evolved in how participating in LIJAC lead them to actively participate in *el Caño*'s community organizing work (citar practicum). While finishing the project mentioned above, I learned about *G-8*'s educational project and immediately capture my imagination about the possibilities of how schools and community-based organizations could collaborate in bringing educational change that could transform not only youth's learning experiences but also their communities and beyond. The possibilities of bringing educational change to a school lead by community members was for me a re-learning experience as a teacher.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will follow the conventions of academia of what it is expected in this kind of work but at the same time I want to follow the pathways of possibilities the G-8's community organizing work have pointed to build transformative learning spaces in and out of schools when community's residents are *actores de su propio futuro* in the process. Expressly, how the Freirean participatory approach historically used in *el Caño*'s community organizing work was key in the educational project to design a curriculum for social transformation have the potential to bring the needed educational change to state sanction school. Simultaneously, I present the affordances that reside in the implementation of said approach in a centralized school system which at the same time is located in a colonized context like Puerto

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Rico and which said system have historically perpetuated the colonial relationship with United

State.

Hence, from a decolonial stance I would argue that the actions engaged by the

community leadership for the implementation of their curriculum for social transformation are

actions towards the decolonization of the curriculum and society. As a decolonial act, they were

recovering the *saberes* that were actively circulating across *el Caño*'s eight communities that

resulted from the historical *lucha* to stay in their *tierra* and their right to safe and adequate

housing (Baquedano et. al., 2014). That is, when the G-8's leadership initiated an educational

project as part of their community organizing work and developed a curriculum that centered

their *lucha comunitaria* for *el dragado* and their *saberes*, they were engaging in an epistemic

disobedience that would disrupt the legacies of coloniality in Puerto Rico's schooling and

beyond.

(RE)POSITIONALITY

As noted in the methodology, my positionality in this project was guided by coordinates

of answerability towards learning, knowledge and context (Patel, 2016). Rather than using these

coordinates as a prescriptive form for my reflexivity as a researcher, it helped me to illuminate

both the coloniality in my role as *investigador* and the decolonial work in the theory of action

from *el Caño*'s organizing work. The coordinates of answerability also helped me to think about

my role as a teacher in the colonial enterprise of schooling. Thus, in returning to my positionality

I aim to be answerable to what I have learned from the multigenerational organizing work by *el*

Caño's leadership to build *su propio futuro*. Also, as stressed in the methodology, being

answerable to learning toward fully embodying the decolonial stance in this work (Patel, 2016, p.

75) and an opportunity to reconfigure my relationality with *el Caño* as a teacher.

After listening to the stories shared by *el Caño*'s leadership and their struggle to have a school that better served their youth, I came to understand that my positionality as an educator needed to be reconfigured as I move forward. Thus, as the outside *investigador* and a science teacher, I found in Patel's idea of answerability to learning a space to engage in what post-colonial theorist Andreotti referred to as a "reconfiguration of relationality" as part of the learning process in this project. Specially, as an educator that is planning to come back to the classroom and aspire to continuing learning along future educators. My relationship with *el Caño* started (in)directly, when I was a middle school Science teacher in San Juan. I noted this because during my visits to *el Caño* as an outside *investigador* I ran into some of my former students that were young community leaders. As noted in my initial positionality, my concerned about teaching for the test rather than developing learning experiences that were connected to the students' experiences outside particularly their community organizing work the schools during my teaching career I was more. Hence, it is important to reflect on how to reconfigure the pedagogical practices that further the disconnection between communities and schooling which speaks to the pervasiveness of coloniality in our actions (Patel, 2016). This entails that as "educational researchers [we] must reflect on our past and often time harmful practices" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 376S) both in educational research and schooling as sites of coloniality (Patel, 2016). Here is where it lays the action of the prefix re- for the title of this section. Hence, after the learning experience during this project my positionality as the science teacher and the *investigador* could not stay the same.

That being said, the reflections on *el Caño*'s organizing work presented in this chapter are shaped mostly by my aforementioned science teacher experience. These reflections aim to highlight the possibilities to reconfigure teacher's relationality within educational collaborations

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from a decolonial stance. In other words, while teachers did not participate in this project and no "empirical evidence" was included besides the leadership's *testimonio* on teachers, I approach the reflection as a (re)imagination of my own pedagogical practice. Such (re)imagining involves considering how as educators we can contribute to move forward the organizing work from communities like *el Caño*, across the learning communities in teacher education, curriculum theorizing and educational organizing. For instance, as a school-based science educator this represents "moving the main purpose of science education away from presenting ideas, concepts, and practices avoid of context" and adopting pedagogical practices where "students are given the opportunities produce scientific knowledge in service of their community" (Varelas et. al. 2008, p. 62). At the same time, it is important to consider the knowledges and expertise community organizing when it comes to prepare educators in building collaboration for educational change (Zeichner et al., 2015). Hence, main argument is that community-school collaboration opens the possibilities for teachers to engage in decolonial acts with communities that aim to bring change in public education.

SUMMARY OF *EL CAÑO'S* STORIES

The purpose of this dissertation was to bring front and center the stories of the community leadership from *el Caño* around their experiences during an educational project that started as a collaborative agreement with the centralized DEPR. Through the previous chapters I aspired to present how the G-8's leadership turned to their *apoderamiento comunitario* and *sentido de pertenencia* to implement a curriculum focus on social transformation designed with the participation of residents and community leadership in an elementary school. Following a decolonial stance, I underlined the instances where the community engaged in what I saw as a

decolonial act or when there was a manifestation of the logics of coloniality during the emergent collaboration.

For me, it was important to first present how the community leaders from *el Caño*'s eight communities engaged in a community organizing work to defend their permanence, facilitated by social workers through a Freirean Participatory approach adopted by a state public environmental project opened the door for the residents to be for the first time *actores de su propio futuro*. More important was to highlight the intergenerational relationship to the *tierra* of their *abuelos* and how that *sentido de pertenencia* led them to organized and create the conditions to see their *futuro* materialized.

Key to this process of community organizing was the *educación política* that took place across different spaces in dynamic and creative ways with a multigenerational approach. At the same time, a Freirean popular education methodology, facilitated by community social workers, aimed to create spaces where residents and community leaders could engage in critical reflection and *diálogos* around the social, economic and political structures that had created the conditions of historical colonized marginalization of their communities and beyond. Community leaders shared their stories of how participating in these learning spaces (e.g. *Universidad del Barrio*) and specifically the community organizing work, led them to raise a *pensamiento crítico* to defend their *tierra* and create the conditions to transform their communities. While young people have actively participated along adult leadership across these spaces, and Enlace was reaching children in *el Caño*'s schools through leadership development initiatives like Guapre, the G-8's educational project was designed to implement a curriculum with a *educación política* focus to develop young leadership with *pensamiento crítico* to transform their community in an elementary school.

In the previous chapter I aimed to present G-8's educational project as part of their community organizing work. The main question in this chapter was: How has the G8-DEPR collaboration emerged and evolved in the context of the development and implementation of an innovative educational project?

Through the previous chapters I have argued that residents' *apoderamiento comunitario* and their *sentido de pertenencia* were foundational to be agents of change to transform *el Caño* and education in schools as part of their community organizing work. For G-8's leadership and Enlace, it was important to organized in order to challenge the historical government neglect towards *el Caño* that was used as a subterfuge to forced them out of their communities. This historical abandonment towards *el Caño* was also seen in the *pobre educación* young people were receiving. Thus, *transformar la educación* and community-school relationship was also part of their comprehensive plan to transform *el Caño*. To accomplished this goal, G-8 establish an agreement of collaboration to implement a curriculum in leadership and social transformation build upon the political education of their community organizing work.

As it happened in the design of the comprehensive plan, G-8's leadership brought their *saberes* to develop the collaborative agreement and the curriculum design. Their *saberes* were based on their experiences and aspirations to improve the wellbeing in their communities after navigating the structural marginalization they have been subjected to. Hence, the community was engaged in a participatory process where their *saberes* were central to transform institutional practices at the state level. For the G-8 "*la educación tiene un rol fundamental*" in promoting the economic and social wellbeing of their communities. Therefore, having schools in their communities underserving their youth was an issue that needed to be address in order to follow the developmental plan *el Caño*'s residents designed. In AC's words: "*Porque de nada vale que*

tu desarrolles una comunidad de manera integral y la escuela esté atrás. Con una visión asistencialista, con una visión de educación bancaria" (Interview). As a result, the G-8's leadership agreed with the DEPR leadership in implementing an educational project focus in leadership and social transformation.

In addition to improve youth literacy by developing leaders for their communities, the educational project for *La Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña* geared towards reconfiguring the community's place inherent in state sanctioned schooling by centering *la comunidad* in regards school-community relations. Expressly, their *lucha comunitaria* towards *el Caño* transformation. Needless, it was their *lucha comunitaria* that informed the idea of social transformation in the curriculum. This shows how the *saberes* that have been transforming the communities in *el Caño* were foundational for the new curriculum. For DEPR leadership the new educational project was both a signal to communities to work together with the centralized system and also a political project that did not align with the ideological and colonial form of state-sanctioned schooling.

The collaborative agreement evolved in a contentious relationship in which the central and the local school leadership joined forces to impeded the full implementation of the curriculum. At the central level, after three administrations, with the signed agreement and the school inaugurated (both events displayed in the media) the DEPR leadership was constantly pushing the leadership's limit of patience by not actively collaborating. Instead, they were dragging their feet and did not follow up in the curriculum implementation. At the school level, the principal was not assisting the community leaders in the process of having teachers engage by diminishing the curriculum and its implementation.

Thus, the tensions around the curriculum content and its implementation between the colonial DEPR and the G-8's leadership denotes how forms of community-school collaboration that are institutionalized hinder the transformative work of CBOs. Moreover, the politics of coloniality of deemed community knowledge as no important to contribute in bringing educational change will make the collaboration not viable. This was the case of the G8-DEPR's collaboration. The community leadership took the hard decision to retire from the collaboration and find other ways to have their educational project for *La Escuela de Liderazgo y Transformación Social del Caño Martín Peña*.

In the next section I present how G-8's educational organizing connects to other forms of community-school collaborations.

CONNECTING *EL CAÑO* TO COMMUNITY-SCHOOL COLLABORATION TO BRING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

In this section I present how the experiences from *el Caño*'s leadership in bringing change to a local elementary school connects to the other community-school collaboration for educational change reported on the literature. For this purpose, I will focus on three major areas I understand can contribute to the field on school-community relations. I will start by discussing how the institutionalization of a collaborative approach between G-8 community-based group and DEPR centralized educational system can hinder residents' efforts to bring educational change as part of their agenda to transform their communities. Then, I look at how school-community collaboration grounded organizing work to bring educational change to communities like *el Caño*, should reconfigure their focus on *partnerships* to solidary relations. I end this section discussing how CBOs can engage in curriculum design that centers the experiences and

saberes around their *lucha comunitaria* to bring educational change in their communities and beyond.

Institutionalization of a Community Educational Project

One experience of the *protagonistas* from this educational project that connects to other community organizing work revolve around the institutionalization of collaborative agreements to bring educational change. While other community-based organizations (CBOs) might have positive outcomes in the institutionalizations of this form of collaboration with educational leadership at the district or school level in the U.S. (citar), the G-8 had to explore other ways to implement their educational project after they withdrew their participation due to the lack of support from the highly centralized DEPR. Yet, the G-8's experience in bringing educational change as part of their developmental plan for *el Caño* also brings a new perspective of how CBOs that have actively participating in the transformation of their community infrastructure and environment faced resistance in a colonial geopolitical context.

Warren and colleagues noted that there's a challenge in building collaborative relationships between parent and educators "because the starting point is one of unequal knowledge and power" (Warren et. al., 2009, p. 2240). This also can be rendered from the experiences of CBOs and educational systems in forging collaborative agreement for educational change in schools in their neighborhoods. Moreover, the unequal power and knowledge relationship became more prominent when that collaboration is established within the geopolitical context of a centralized educational system that is part of a colonial administration. To illustrate, in terms of power the G-8 brought their community power to build a collaborative agreement with DEPR's administration in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico. While the community leadership were proposing the collaborative agreement grounded on their *apoderamiento*

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comunitario, the endemic and historical colonial power in Puerto Rico's educational institutions further put the G-8's in a disadvantage position. Simultaneously, community leaders faced the U.S. colonial power (in the hands of its Congress[15]) that obliquely operates through the state-like DEPR and the internal colonial forces that daily aim to whether maintain the status quo or advocate to "join" the *greatest democratic nation*. In addition, this colonial power is centralized within the bureaucratic DEPR's structure allowing the Secretary of Education to stablish educational policies almost by decree through what are known as *Cartas Circulares*. This illustrate the power relation in which the G-8 was entering as a CBO, which add a heavier layer that have historically undergirded the educational system in Puerto Rico.

In terms of knowledge, as "*la voz de las ochos comunidades*" (EQ, Interview) the G-8's leadership brought their *saberes* from their *lucha comunitaria* in the design of both the collaborative agreement and the curriculum for the school in social transformation. By doing this the community leadership reconfigured the *márgenes* of the historical water/lands of *el Caño Martín Peña* as a geopolitical space by recovering the knowledge rooted in their communities by designing the collaborative educational project in its entirely. By this I mean that through and from their 'otherness' the community leadership were pushing back on the *estereoptipos* concerning epistemic difference by critiquing and presenting solutions to the "*educación pobre*" *el Caño*'s youth were receiving at DEPR's schools. To illustrate, AC noted sarcastically in interview how DEPR and school's leadership would not accept that the "*comunidad decida y enseñe*" in educational matters because "they needed a doctorate from Harvard to do so". This deficit framing towards *el Caño*'s communities have also been the experience of other CBOs,

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[15] Puerto Rico's sovereignty is under U.S. Congress' plenary powers by decree of the Paris' Treaty signed with Spain after the Cuban-Spanish-American War. In short, Puerto Rico is a U.S. colony.

particularly in the U.S., that have actively worked to bring educational change to their neighborhoods schools (cite). The reasons for school and educational leadership to adopt this deficit framing are multiple but it is important to recognize the double reach of the colonial legacies when it comes to understand the unequal relationship between communities and schools (Baquedano-López, et. al., 2014, p. 17). Scholars have widely discussed how the state-sanctioned schools have historically played an active and passive role in the establishment and (re)production of coloniality (citar altusser, et al que esta en cap 3) particularly in Indigenous and Black communities in U.S. (el del libro q me regalo heilman), and its colonies like Puerto Rico. In view of this, state-sanctioned schools have followed the politics of coloniality that privileged the Anglo-Euro-Centric knowledges and its ontological construction of the Other (Baquedano-López, et. al., 2014; Dussel and Ibarra-Colado as cited in Ibarra-Colado, 2007). Thus, schools and its centralized structures became geopolitical spaces where the identities and forms of being of students and their families/communities are inscribed by relations of power (Hall, 1997). I would argue, then, that when communities organized around educational projects that centers residents' *saberes* CBOs like the G-8 are engaging in epistemic disobedience by (re)affirming their communities *saberes* (Mignolo, 2007) that has been circulating in the *mágenes* which are rooted in the experiential knowledge of their *lucha comunitaria* (Baquedano-López, et. al., 2014).

In this context, CBOs that aimed to bring change in schools through educational projects that center the power and knowledges of communities should move away from the institutionalization of said projects in order to bring educational change crucial to their transformative community organizing work. As it was the G-8's experience, the historical colonial discourse that pervades in state-sanctioned schooling deemed communities as not

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capable of working to bring change. Simultaneously, educational leadership hold onto their *expert* position to avoid any transformation to the institutionalized and unequal power relations with communities. This position, which has been perpetuate by DEPR's colonial administration, greater allow to hypertrophy their already centralized power to the point "of drown out" (Freire, 1998, p. 31, my translation) the community power CBOs have built as part of their community organizing work to transform their neighborhoods and their school as it was the case of the collaborative agreement between G-8 and DEPR. Thus, I consider that the institutionalization of community educational projects like the one proposed by the G-8 cannot bring educational change to schools until colonial history of power relations (i.e. politics of coloniality) are abolish and decolonized.

Speaking from his experience as Secretary of Education of Sao Paulo, Brazil, Freire (1998) explained that in order to bring democratic participation in schools in alignment with their political project it was needed the transformation of those power relations (p. 32). He noted that by democratizing the decision-making process within the schooling system students, parents, teachers and communities participated in the design of educational policies responsive to their schools. According to Freire (1998), this de-centralized approach contrasts with centralized systems that serve "authoritarian, elitists, and above all, traditional administrations of colonial inclinations" (p. 32). In the case of the G-8's leadership, they were aware of how DEPR's centralized power was hindering the possibilities of implementing their educational project to continue in building community power among *el Caño*'s young people. According to the leadership interviewed for this project, the implementation of their educational project could have been successful if DEPR's administration could *acompañar* the community leadership by actively collaborate in the project rather than *to torpedo* it. In U.S. school districts, CBOs have

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seen how their community work has been successful when superintendents, teachers and administrators became allies by joining community efforts to bring educational change in schools (citar sobre esto). As a matter of fact, the G-8's experience with DEPR's as a state agency contrasts with their experience with Enlace where a process of *acompañamiento* to the community work and a Freirean participatory approach empowered them to create public policy to transform their communities. While the G-8's could not see this transformation taking place in their school, they were able to create a curriculum that centers their *saberes* and their experiences of *lucha comunitaria* which they are moving forward by working on having their space and use their community power to transform the education for *el Caño*'s younger generations.

Acompañamiento: Solidarity over Partnerships

Scholars have rightly noted that when families, schools and community work collaboratively wonders happens in schools (Henderson & Mapp in Sanders, 2009). This assessment within the scholarship on school-community relations is mostly based on how the aforementioned groups can create *partnerships* towards the improvement of youth's educational experience in schools as public institutions (citar) but sometimes failed in thinking of how said relational approach align with CBOs organizing work to transform their communities. In this section, I present an extended critique to this approach following Bauch (2001) commentary on how the advisedly use of the term *partnership* in the educational writing responded to "the accountability movement and marketization of schools" (p. 205). Hence, understanding G-8's collaboration with DEPR from a decolonial stance might shed light on how to reimaging school-community relationships where communities well-being is prioritized over school's performativity under the premises of accountability. Particularly, foregrounding CBOs

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organizing work to transform their neighborhoods can shift the focus of school community

collaboration away from the ways in which *partnerships* might exert institutional control on

communities' projects to bring educational change to schools. It reframed how these

collaborations are built by engaging in relations of *solidarity* "that hinges on radical differences

and that insists on relationships of incommensurable interdependency" (Gaztambide-Fernández,

2012, p. 46).

Solidary relations in school-community here is following Gaztambide-Fernández (2012)

decolonizing pedagogy of solidarity as a way to "shift the focus away from either explaining or

enhancing existing social arrangements, seeking instead to challenge such arrangements and their

implied colonial logic" (p. 49). Just as Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) "seek to reimagine the

ethical encounters with other that challenge present conditions of colonization and inequality" (p.

50) I aimed to follow his lead but in the context of the collaboration between G-8 and DEPR.

The author proposed three intertwined modes of solidary work: relational, transitive, and

creative. I will focus in the first two. While each type of solidarity has their own description, its

discussion is out of the scope of this chapter. However, I will address this when necessary.

After learning how G-8's comprehensive and participatory educational project was not

implemented due to the lack of *acompañamiento* from DEPR colonial administration, it made me

questioned the way school and community *partnerships* are categorized in educational literature.

Joyce L. Epstein's seminal model of overlapping spheres of influences is one of the most

influential models on school-community partnership. The author argues that students' learning

and development will depend of how schools, families and communities (i.e. the spheres of

influences) "draw together or pushed apart" (Epstein, 2010, p. 82). This model is comprised in

one hand by an *external model* where the practices of each are sphere located. The other part is

the *internal* model which "show the where and how complex the essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community" (Epstein 210, p. 82). While this *partnership* model center students, it still heavily relaying in the actions schools to initiated communications with families and communities. I agree in part with this model and recognized how students learning and development can see improvement when the "three spheres" come together but it still shows how this model is still an institutionalized *partnership*. I would also argue that institutionalized models on traditional *partnerships* maintain a one-way communication towards schools turning the "student's center" discourse in mere rhetoric. At the same time, its lend itself to reproduce traditional knowledge as it effectiveness "rest largely on teachers' and administrators' knowledge about partnerships and their capacity to work collaboratively with adults in students' families and communities" (Sanders, 2009, p. 1696). Thus, the voices and participation of youth, parents and community members might be further pushed to the margins.

Successful collaborations to community organizing work point to how school and community relationships should move beyond traditional school community partnerships (Ishimaru, 2014; Orr & Rogers, 2011; Warren, 2011). In the case of the G8-DEPR collaboration it did not yield the expected results as the DEPR's leadership ignored the community leadership's invitation to be active partner of their educational project in *acompañarlos* in the process. The lack of commitment to a relational stance with the community speaks to how CBOs educational project can be jeopardize if educational leadership does not develop a solidary relation. From a pedagogy of solidarity as relational is important "to make a deliberate commitment to a relational stance" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012, p. 51) in school-community collaboration have just and equitable outcomes that respond to communities organizing work. *El*

Caño's communities saw this happened during the community organizing work as they saw Enlace's social workers *acompañándolos* in the process. As a result, they build *apoderamiento comunitario* and created the political context by *creando política pública* needed to institute and sustain the comprehensive plan to transform *el Caño*. This *acompañamiento* contrast sharply with the institutionalization of the partnership model describe in the previous section and also experienced by the community leadership during the educational project. Through *acompañamiento*, the institution's counterpart move away from the colonial framing that negates 'other's' *saberes* by centering community's *saberes* (Walsh, 2007) . But when schools decided to follow traditional partnerships where communities' *saberes* are deemed as not valuable, relationships are not grounded in solidarity and aim to collapse, as it was the case of this project. On the community leadership side, they were committed to transform the *educación pública* "*porque creemos en [ella]*" (AC, Interview). They understood that a public education system should have simultaneously have the *estudiante* and "*la comunidad como centro*" (AC, Interview). By centering the community and their *saberes* in school-community collaborations there is simultaneously an epistemic and an ontological shift from those in power relations. In other words, when communities' knowledges and their organizing work are deemed as valuable to bring educational change schools-community collaborations are reconfigure. Thus, a pedagogy of solidarity as relational (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012) remind us that educational leadership (i.e. the self) that aimed to engage in collaboration with communities need to recognized the colonial history of schooling and how that relationship have shaped the way communities (i.e. the other) are seen in relation to schools.

According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), solidary relations need also to be transitive which require "actions taken in relationship to someone" that simultaneously will "affects or

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modified the one who acts" (p. 54). He further warns about falling on common "expressions of solidarity that largely work to exculpate and exonerate or to ignore complicity on ongoing colonization" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 54) and reject "celebrity humanitarianism". Looking back when the G-8's community leadership signed the agreement with former DEPR's Secretary Rafael Román in 2016 a press conference was held specific with the occasion. There, Román and CF posed for the cameras while other politicians also took advantage of the photo opportunity. This image is an example of how the DEPR's Secretary was performing the "celebrity humanitarianism" Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) was warns about. The agreement and the curriculum design that followed, were in response to the unidirectional relationship DEPR's leadership have historically maintained towards communities and students in *el Caño.* After the agreement was signed the community leadership developed the curriculum, organized teacher workshops for its implementation, resorted from their social capital to refurbish school facilities and organized parents in school. During that process the DEPR and school leadership was absent leaving all the work to the community. Instead, they followed their colonizing historical design to sabotage an educational project that would have transform the *pobre* public education *el Caño*'s youth were receiving. Thus, DEPR's authoritarian and traditional leadership with colonial inclination (Freire, 1998, p. 32) opted to be "celebrity humanitarians" over engaging in a transitive solidarity with *la lucha comunitaria del Caño* and their residents. To reiterate, the actions taken by the G-8 in relation to this collaboration were grounded in transforming the *pobre educación* in DEPR's schools.

Curricularizing of *lucha comunitaria*: connecting school and community through *lucha comunitaria*

In addition to build the collaborative agreement, the community leadership also participated in the design of a curriculum for leadership and social transformation as part of the educational project to bring change to their neighborhood schools. The experiences of the deliberation and curriculum design, and the community fight to see the curriculum implemented. The significance of community leadership experiences, where the community challenged how communities are represented and what knowledges are included in the curriculum, represent an important lesson for community organizing for school transformation. The G8 leadership and collaborators designed the curriculum around the community organizing work to transform *el Caño*'s communities. The community organizing work was capture within five major themes that include 1) *Comunidad*; 2) *Derechos Humanos*; 3) *Liderazgo*; 4) *Conciencia Crítica*; 5) *Transformación Social*. Each theme or *pilares*, would guide the pedagogical practices to simultaneously increase academic literacy among *el Caño*'s children while also promote *pensamiento crítico* from a *formación política* standpoint. This educational approach proposed by the community leadership was drawing from their experience with youth leadership programs and other initiatives to build community power across the multigeneration residents. Moreover, G-8 wanted to provide an education for young people to be agents of change in their community.

A high quality curriculum in school neighborhoods has been part of the priorities for educational organizing (Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2002; Warren, 2011). The fact that other communities have advocated for a high-quality curriculum as part of their educational organizing work speaks to the need of re-thinking new forms of curriculum design for schools. G-8's efforts connect to other educational organizing work experiences by sharing new forms of

community-based curriculum participatory design that center residents' *saberes* and *lucha comunitaria*. The G-8 leadership active collaboration challenge the traditional approach by having partners helping in developing a curriculum that simultaneously aimed to increase students' critical literacy while also building power to became community leaders. Having these main goals in the curriculum speaks to the pedagogical implications of centering organizing work in school classrooms hosted by communities. Through implementing a curriculum focused on leadership and social transformation in public educational spaces, the community leadership are making sure schools are going hand by hand with the broader agenda of community transformation. The participatory community-based curriculum challenged "the business as usual in the classroom, where the histories and narratives of young people and their families [and communities] were marginalized" (Cruz, 2012, p. 465).

It can be argued that the fact the curriculum is considered a contested terrain rests on the idea that curriculum is power (Cruz, 2012). Thus, as these power relations are inscribed by the politics of colonial legacies we can rethink about the curriculum "in light of coloniality and the search of decolonization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242). Therein, the curriculum can simultaneously be informed but also shaped the epistemic and ontological practices of human relations. In other words, "what is deemed worthwhile curricular knowledge is rooted in how the human is conceptualised" (Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 6). In school-community relationships, educational institutions have held a historical, and to certain extent, uncontested colonial discourse that conceptualized communities, students and their families in a deficit fashion inscribing "otherness" on them (Bishop as cited in Cruz, 2012, p.467). Hence, when CBOs engage in curriculum design, they are challenging the power and knowledge that have historically deemed them as the "other."

Conclusion

In order to guarantee community participation in collaborative agreement to transform public education, educational leadership should move away from traditional approaches of *partnership* when working with CBOs. Moreover, they should adopt practices of relational collaboration that facilitates the opening of spaces to questioned and challenge the historical colonizing project of schooling and how it pervades in students' communities and society in general. By engaging in solidary forms of relation and collaborations with the organizing work CBOs are already carrying out in their communities, educational leadership can benefit from the significant contributions organizing can make in promoting equitable "school/community connection, school climate, and high-quality curriculum and instruction" (Warren, 2011, p. 156). As a decolonial turn, centering communities *saberes* and their educational organizing as part of a broader community transformation agenda is a step forward in the search of decolonization (Marldonado-Torres, 2002). Hence, schools need to come clean in recognized their historical complicity in subjugating colonial young people to the legacies of colonialism.

ANSWERABLE TO *SABERES*: FOREGROUNDING THE AFFORDANCES

(FORMERLY LIMITATIONS)

Following Leigh Patel's clarion call to move away from a praxis of coloniality by adopting a praxis of ethics grounded in "being responsible, accountable and being part of an exchange" (Patel, 2016, p. 73) as educational researcher, I move away from the academia conventions of dedicate this section to note the *limitations* of this project. Rather, I want to center the affordances of the G-8's educational project and be answerable to their *saberes* as community leaders which have been essential to reimagining and transforming their communities (Patel, 2016, p. 79). This dissertation did not unpack the richness of the community

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leaders' stories in their totality, neither it was the intention. Hence, I want focused on two affordances I believe are essential to further discuss in order to understand how the school-community relations are inscribed by politics of coloniality.

One of the themes central to *lucha comunitaria* that needed further discussion is the *sentido de pertenencia* in relation to the place and land the leaders' *abuelos* created. Specifically, the role of sense of place on engaging in the collaborative agreement with the DEPR to bring educational change in schools. It was clear that for G-8's leadership the permanence of their communities was central for their community organizing work and to some extent the educational project as part of their developmental plan. Simultaneously, the curriculum designed by the community aimed to develop future generations of youth to continuing their *lucha comunitaria*. Therefore, I understand the sense of place provide a way to continue to learn how community-based curriculum grounded in a *sentido de pertenencia* contribute in provide an education for young people to be agents of change in their community.

Race and racism were no salient themes in the interviews, neither other data sources, during dialogs around discrimination toward the communities. However, considering that no discussion on decolonization is completed without talking about race and racism, I believe that a closer look to these colonial legacies in school-community relations in Puerto Rico would add depth to the findings of this project. Particularly, is important to foreground race in future projects in order to understand how historically marginalized communities in Puerto Rico have had to navigate an educational system that perpetuates colorism and where race have been "silenced" (citar silencing race) by holding the myth of race harmony that undergirded the Puerto Ricans "national" identity. Following the praxis of ethics (Patel, 2016) I hope to pursue these topics to further contribute to projects of decolonization in Puerto Rico.

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REFLECTING ON COMMUNITY-SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS

The stories shared by G-8 and Enlace community leadership suggest encouraging actions for constructing collaboration to bring decolonial transformation in educational spaces. Community-school collaborations are needed as they can reach broader areas that need radical transformation in neighborhoods and schools as part of those (Schutz, 2006; Warren, 2005). That being said, I am moved to reflect from a decolonial stance on how teachers could better serve projects like G8's organized work for educational change. By bringing my experience as a middle school science teacher and a graduate student, I need to ask, then, how teachers can support community educational organizing work to bring change in the schools they teach their children? How can future and in-service teachers be supported in learning how to build relationship that align with communities' collective futures in educational organizing contexts?

Rather than "ostentatiously link the research to practice" (Han, 2007, p. 387), I will respectfully use this section as a productive and generative space (Patel, 2016, p. 79) to reflect on ways teachers' relationships with community can be sustain in community organizing context. For this purpose, I will first reflect on the urgency to find ways in supporting both future and in-service teachers towards a reconfiguration of the teacher-community relationship in the context of community organizing. Then, I look at community-school collaboration's affordances for teacher learning by highlighting how/what teachers can learn from collaborating with communities in a relational form.

Towards a Reconfiguration of Teacher-Community Relations in Community-Schools Collaborations

While teachers are only one component within the complex and multidimensional community-school collaboration, teachers' active collaboration can also be crucial in the

accomplishment of community organizing in schools. Moreover, effective traditional partnerships involving school, families and community "rest largely in teachers' and administrators' knowledge about partnership and their capacity to work collaboratively" with community members (Sanders, 2009, p. 1696). Hence, is important to pay attention to the tensions in the parent-community-teacher relation which are inherent to community-school collaborations (Gold et al., 2002; Warren et al., 2011).

For instance, teachers might be wary of CBOs and "fear that these organizations will make unreasonable demands and intrusions into the professional sphere" (Warren, 2005, p. 4). The idea of seeing families and outside community organization as intruders into particular "spheres", in this case the "teachers' professional sphere," maintain the colonial legacy that further marginalized families and communities in educational matters (Baquedano￼López et al., 2014). In a manner, it can be argued that the inherent tensions in teacher-communities relations are undergird by the anthropocentric discourse about social and natural relationships (Desai and Sanya's, 2016). From decolonial and new-materialist stances, Desai and Sanya (2016) pushback on this discourse by noting "that the notion of an autonomous being and human agency itself is a fallacy" (p. 10). Instead, the authors further explained "we exist […] in the mutual constitution of entangled agencies amongst human and non-human world" or "intra-actions" (Barad as cited in Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 10). In other words, as teachers our ability to act in schools take place within the ways we build relations with students and their parents and communities, and vice versa. Thus, is imperative to reconfigure teacher-community relationship toward a relational power (Warren et. al., 2011).

This form of power relation pushback on the anthropocentric notion "that the human is an autonomous individual" (Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 10) and is more align with the idea of intra-

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actions. Thus, for stronger communities-schools collaboration to take place in organizing contexts is needed to delink from deficit approaches of separation of sphere's (Warren et. al., 2011; Warren, 2005) and "autonomous agency", and reconfigure teachers-communities relation towards a relational power.

This ontological shift cannot take place within school institutions that are undergird by oppressive relations inscribed by the politics of coloniality. Thus, community and teachers need to find other spaces in the margins where both could engage in a dialog from the alterity. This "productive liminal space of alterity" (Desai and Sanya, 2016, p. 12) is a space oriented toward an ethical re-configuration of relationality (Andreotti) of colonial differences between self (i.e. teachers) and the other (i.e. community).

As noted, G8-DEPR's collaboration geared toward a unilateral power from the colonial centralized administration. This result in delaying the curriculum implementation and the principal and teachers not fully cooperating with project, hindering the possibilities to engage in a relational power (Warren et. al. 2011). I would argue that DEPR's unilateral power also hinder the possibilities for teachers to fully participate in the collaboration. During a radio show two weeks after the inauguration of the school in August 2017, the liaison teacher of the curriculum in leadership and social transformation express how excited she and teachers were about having an educational project like the one proposed by the community (Rico, 2017). This initial excitement apparently did not translate in strengthening the relationship as the principal opted to continuing DEPR's business as usual and teachers follow suit. According to the leadership interviewed, the teachers later expressed that they felt they were losing their autonomy when community leaders followed up in the implementation of the curriculum. This illustrated how the

relationship between teachers and community leaders emerged in a context of collaboration but it evolved in a contentious partnership (Warren, 2005).

While this might also speak to the tensions that emerge from the sphere crossing mindset, it is important to note to political and economic background where teachers were positioned during the educational project's design and implementation. In a centralized system like DEPR, teachers can feel already disempowered when the curriculum and teaching practices are dictated by a central administration (Renée & McAllister, 2011; Warren et. al. 2011). Thus, it would be expected that when the community came along with a new project, teachers felt like more work was put on them. As noted above, this also affected their sense of agency. These tensions have also have as a backdrop a precarious teachers' working conditions that includes a base salary of $22,500.00 (Rivera Clemente, 2019), which is approximately a 36.5% of the average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary school in the United States for the academic year of 2018-2019 (Statistics, 2019). In addition to the precarious economic conditions teachers labored in Puerto Rico every day, the school closure policies left around 7,000 teachers laid off. This precariousness is also translated in not having funds for to have better classrooms. In my experience, for several years I taught science with no lab materials provided by school of the DEPR, outdated textbooks and overcrowded classes. In our ill equipped (to say the less) classroom, kitchen chemistry labs were possible thanks for students and me brough the ingredients from home. This present the imperative to have a conversation with teachers from an relational organizing stance to understand how, if at all, DEPR's centralized structure and other political and economic conditions (including neoliberal policies post disaster in colonial context) have played a role in their decision to not collaborate with a project for social transformation. This also speak to why this conversation needed to happen along the community leadership, in

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this case the G-8's, out of the school setting in order for a collaboration between communities-teachers became relational said collaboration needs to take place in spaces of alterity (Desai & Sanya, 2016).

As it has shown in their report on 66 community organizing groups to improve public education in the U.S., the Institute for Education and Social Policy (2002) noted that there were "few important instances" where teachers became allies of organizing efforts (p. 24). The report included examples of teachers supporting community initiatives around adult literacy programs (e.g. Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago), efforts to help parents in being informed around school reform discussion (e.g. Alliance Organizing Projects, Philadelphia), and initiating campaigns high-stake testing (Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2002, p. 14). The experiences from communities around the U.S. fighting for change when working with teachers present promising strategies to move forward educational organizing from a decolonial approach of reconfiguring the colonial difference of communities-teachers relation. In the instance of G8-DEPR collaboration, this ontological shift would have opened the possibilities for teachers to engage in solidary relation so teachers could be trustful of community leaders when it came to bring educational change to schools.

Teacher learning

In this section I am pointing at what I understand the story of the G8-DEPR collaboration offers to teacher learning. Looking at their 20 years of work on teacher learning, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytlhe (1999) bounded the diverse ideas on "the sine qua non" (p. 249) of school change efforts in three principal conceptions: 1) knowledge *for* practice; 2) knowledge *of* practice; 3) knowledge *of* practice. By presenting a decolonial critic to teacher

learning as knowledge *of* practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytleh, 1999) I highlight how/what

teachers can learn from collaborating with communities in a relational form.

According to Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytleh (1999) while the other two conceptions

locate *knowledge* in the divide of formal and practical knowledge respectively. The conception

of knowledge *of* practice hinge on the idea that "the knowledge teachers need to teach is

generated" when teachers engage in active educational research in their schools and classroom

and "treat the knowledge and theory produce by others as generative material for interrogation

and interpretation" (Cochran-Smith & Lytleh, 1999, p. 250). In other words, when teacher

became action researchers and critically examine the research done around their teaching

practices in their professional lifespan they simultaneously are learning from their/others

research experience. Is my opinion that this position to knowledge rendered decolonial

possibilities for teaching learning in community-school collaboration as productive liminal space

of alterity.

As Cochran-Smith & Lytleh (1999) made it clear, knowledge will be always problematic

and knowledge *of* practice point to inquiry as the medium for teachers to problematize their own

knowledge and practices. This is, in my view, the starting point to reflect on teacher learning in

light of coloniality and the search of decolonization (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The decolonial

tradition have challenge the notion of knowledge as neutral by noting how coloniality negate

"other's" knowledges through epistemic violence by etching Anglo-Euro-centric knowledge as

the center (e.g. Walsh, 2007). So, in order to understand how teacher learning from a knowledge

of practice position can rendered decolonial possibilities is important to considered how teacher

should be answerable for learning, knowledge as ontological, and context (Patel, 2016) in

educational spaces. Patel (2016) suggest being answerable to these coordinates as a way to

"manifest a praxis of ethics and move away from a praxis of coloniality" (p. 73) in which educational research has been instilled (Patel, 2016). Being answerable to these coordinates when engaging in teacher learning as knowledge *of* practice affords educators to be responsible and accountable as stewards of learning spaces where knowledges are shared and relationships sustained (Patel, 2016; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 375S). By looking back through the lens of teacher learning as knowledge *of* practice to the organizing work that took place in *el Caño* and how the collaborative agreement emerged and evolved, we can learn from instances that offer possibilities to build collective futures (Patel, 2016)

Learning. In educational research learning is central (Patel, 2016, p. 75) and teacher learning as knowledge *of* practice that aim to transform local educational context need to be answerable to that learning. As a starting point this entails to recognize that learning is not bounded to geological spaces of schooling, and that learning is intra-agentic and relational. By foregrounding the relationship that exist among those engaging in learning experiences and the spaces where that learning is taking place, teachers' practice "as encompassed within but also beyond immediate classroom action" (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999, p. 276) can be explicitly noted. To paraphrase, teachers' role as intra-agents of change and co-constructors of knowledge are informed by their stance in relation to the geopolitics of the learning contexts and their relationship with co intra-agents of change like youth and their communities, including their community organizations (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999, p. 276; Barad as cite on Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 10). I used the pre-fix intra to point at the intra-agentic relationality of learning and move away from the "human agency fallacy" (Desai & Sanya, 2016, p. 10). Thus, communities-school initiatives offered an opportunity for teachers, as part of their practice, to deepen and reconfigured relationships with community in search of decolonization through

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action research and other forms of critically bringing actionable change including community organizing (Andreotti; Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999, p. 276).

In the experience of G-8, Inc. organizing work this was possible through the Freirean participatory approach. The social workers as agent of the state create the conditions along the community leadership to bring their *saberes* in the development of a transformational plan for *el Caño* grounded in residents' *sentido de pertenencia* and longstanding fight for their permanence. The learning experiences undergirded by a critical literacy approach through popular education was key to build a relational intra-agency among community leaders and Enlace's personnel including the social workers. That intra-agency foregrounded the communities' *saberes* and *poder* to bring change to *el Caño* and to the school. This illustrate the possibilities for teachers to learn with organized communities while bringing change in their neighborhoods and schools.

Knowledge [as ontological] practice. From the position of teaching learning as knowledge *of* practice community-school collaborative initiatives can be considered learning spaces where all of its participants can collectively construct the knowledge needed to locally develop curriculum and more horizontal social/community relations (p. 274). This in fact was the aim of the G8-DEPR's collaborative agreement initiated by *el Caño*'s leadership. While teachers learning as discuss in this section did not took place in this collaboration, I believe in the possibilities that this initiative provide for future cooperation grounded in decolonial solidary relations.

While inquiry is not inherently part of community-school collaborations, the knowledge *of* practice approach offers the prospect for teachers to join community members in critically examine the ways institution of schooling operates in local communities and how to transform them. For instance, G-8's leadership stance was that schools were not on a par with the social

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transformation that was taking place in *el Caño* and actions were needed to challenge DEPR's neglect on student literacy by offering an education responsive to *el barrio* (AC, Interview). Thus, this approach moves away of traditional educational research as production of 'findings' (p. 274). Is in this point where decolonial possibilities for teacher learning can happen. In other words, decolonial practices in teacher learning are possible as long as inquiry take place in productive and generative spaces to collectively (communities-teachers) engage in the pursuing of knowledge to transform immediate educational context by being answerable to community *saberes* (Patel, 2016). If we look back to the Freirean participatory approach central to both the community and educational organizing work in *el Caño*, we would see how the *saberes* of the community were central in the design of the transformational plan for their communities and schools. While the majority of the teachers from the local school played passive role in the educational project, those like the liaison teacher that active participate along community members and university-based teachers had the opportunity to collectively design the curriculum for social transformation. This shows how a dialogical Freirean participatory approach can bring teachers as researchers and communities to a dialogical process that facilitates the understanding of the social conditions/structure that constrain the community's development in order to promote change through praxis (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Hence, community-school collaborations like G8-DEPR can be considered a major context for teacher learning to collectively engage in collective pursuing of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Susan L. Lytlhe, 1999; Patel, 2016).

Within community-school's collaborations where community's *saberes* are central, the collective construction of knowledge affords for the development of humanizing relationships between teachers and community (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 375S). As noted in the

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previous section, is important to engage in this ontological/epistemological pursue as a pedagogical act grounded in solidarity and dialog (Cochran-Smith & Lytleh, 1999; Freire, 1993; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017).

Context. From the knowledge *of* practice perspective teacher learning is linked to "larger change efforts" in school and society (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999, p. 281). In addition, learning is answerable to broader agenda for school and community change (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999). Hence, the intra-agentic relationship in learning spaces of community-school collaboration are "*connected to* and carried out in the service of" (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999, p. 281) bringing change to communities and school. In the case of G-8's educational project, this was seen during the process of the curriculum design for leadership and social transformation for the school in *el Caño*. During the curriculum design community leaders, university-based collaborators, teachers, among others, come together to deliberate what themes should be present in a curriculum that aligned with *la lucha del Caño*. After that, Dr. MS (Teacher Educator at University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras) and her students designed the curriculum building upon the work of the community leaders and their educational philosophy "*con un gran respeto*" (Dr. MS, Interview). For the community leadership the curriculum in *liderazgo y transformación social* was the element to disrupt the low literacy among *el Caño*'s young people that result from the *educación pobre* they were receiving in schools.

The educational organizing work of G-8 leadership and other collaborators aimed to attend the immediate context by bringing to their schools the same change that was taking place across *el Caño*. The community *saberes* were foundational to imagine that another future was possible, as for the first time they were "*actores de su propio futuro*." This is what answerable to context entails. Leigh Patel (2016) noted:

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Being answerable to context dynamically helps to illuminate what kind of knowledges are important. Projects of systematic social change cannot pursue knowledge without regard to the context they are trying to change (p. 81).

Since the beginning of the organizing work facilitated by AC and other community social workers, the community's *saberes*/knowledges were central to bring change. This continued in the educational project as well. In one hand, the organizing work was aiming to have a just and sustainable development in their communities that safeguarded the permanence of the historical communities against the *grandes intereses* in the form of political and economic forces. Simultaneously, the educational project was aiming to offered a better education to future community leaders through a curriculum that would bring social transformation in their communities and beyond.

In short, teacher learning as knowledge *of* practice that extend their connection to larger change efforts through the decolonial approach of being answerable to context affords for community-school collaboration to became space where teachers can join community members can build intra-agentic relationship to transform systemic unjust practices and structures. Moreover, this oppressive and marginalizing structures that pervades in schools and society in general are legacies of colonialism (Baquedano-López, et. al., 2014) that needed to be address by re-configuring ontological and epistemic relations among those engaging in transforming said structures. Thus, it is through the pedagogical act of solidarity (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012) that teachers along community members can pursue knowledges in regard to the context community-school collaboration aim to change (Cochran-Smith & Lytlhe, 1999; Patel, 2016).

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The political groups in the archipelago recognized that the archipelago is in fact a *colonia* of the U.S. while simultaneously "the word *colonia* and its connotations resound in the Puerto

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Rican public life practically without contestation" (Flores, 1999, p. 6, my translation). One of those spaces of public life where the word *colonia* resound without contestation are schools. In the social studies curriculum framework of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR), for instance, the words *colonia* nor *colonialismo* appeared in the document further illustrating how educational institutions are active *cómplices* of the project of coloniality.

As noted in previous chapters, this is not a surprise as schools have historically served to the reproduction of hegemonic discourse and have played an important role during colonization. The *complicidad* of schools, the DEPR particularly, with the project of coloniality in Puerto Rico aimed to erasure a history of more than 500 years of *colonialismo*. For instance, by not contesting *colonialismo* in schools as geopolitical spaces where diverse identities and forms of being are constructed (Butler, 2018) it had impeded that generations of young Puerto Ricans could see themselves as colonized subjects.

Freire put it in this way: "As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the cause of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation" (p.64). Here is where it lays the colonial project of schooling. For the colonial administration this is not a problem but the goal to maintain the status quo and power. In response, community educational projects like the G-8's *Escuela de Liderazgo* represented the antithesis to the logics of coloniality in schooling. The community leadership from *el Caño* have shown that community *saberes* are needed to bring educational change to the school. They have also demonstrated that an education that do not raise a *pensamiento crítico* is not a liberating education. That it's why I see in G-8's community and educational organizing are the paths in search of the decolonization of schooling and Puerto Rico.

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