

NEW HORIZONS IN HISPANIC/LATINO(A) THEOLOGY

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the imaginary by *dis*-covering the hidden stories, and more importantly by deconstructing the scaffold upon which the imaginary is built.

U.S. Latino(a) religious historians should be working toward an unmasking of the colonial discourse by recovering *la memoria rota*.⁸⁰ Their work is seen as regional, particular, and somehow irrelevant for the field, but they still continue to challenge the normative character of the traditional discourse uncovering the voices of the borderlands. In this process the traditional history (the Puritan story) is exposed as particular and regional. This discourse does not seek its own validation by the center, but the validity and historical voice of those people in the borderlands. In this sense, they are engaged in the process of *dis*-covery, but a critique of the modern/colonial character of the dominant discourse is still lacking. The project of *dis*-covering subaltern pasts is committed to expose oppression and exploitation and in that same way helps to uncover the limits of traditional history. In other words, scholars involved in the project of *dis*-covery are following a postmodern approach by focusing their work not on the study of what really happened, but on "the recovery of forgotten, hidden, invisible, considered unimportant, changed and eradicated histories."⁸¹ These scholars are organic intellectuals located in the space where resistance to colonization resides, the borderlands.

This discursive location provides U.S. Latino(a) scholars and others a space where a new epistemology is born. Walter Mignolo acknowledges that to be able to step away from the modern/colonial project, a new epistemology has to be produced, or better yet an already existing epistemology needs to be recovered.⁸² This epistemology thinks from and about the borders, so it is a border epistemology, a subaltern knowledge. This new epistemology not only deals with the particular, but also critiques the totalizing projects that still exist, as the standard narrative in U.S. religious history. U.S. Latino(a) scholars have to strive to decolonize the dominant discourses, using the already existing voices from the borderlands, their stories and memory. In this sense the process of *dis*-covery leads to a process of liberation. While uncovering voices is vital, scholars cannot forget to critique directly the structures and discourses to obtain liberation.

80. *La memoria rota* means the broken memory. The term is used by Arcadio Díaz-Quinones to describe the loss of identity (and the past) produced by colonialism. See Arcadio Díaz-Quinones, *La memoria rota: Ensayos sobre cultura y política* (San Juan: Ediciones Huracán, 1996).

81. Keith Jenkins, *On "What Is History?": From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 38.

82. Mignolo, *Local Histories*.

En-Gendered Territory

*U.S. Missionaries' Discourse in Puerto Rico
(1898–1920)*

MAYRA RIVERA RIVERA

"Puerto Rico — Paradise island since 1898." With this phrase a T-shirt at a Puerto Rican hotel sells a revised creation story for the island. Creation by subordination. What kind of creation was that? Who created? By what means? What was created? In whose image? These questions underlie my present reading of U.S. missionaries' discourse in Puerto Rico immediately following its occupation in 1898.¹ While this is an inquiry into theological ideas and symbols, it is no less an exploration into forces with very concrete social and political effects.

Methodologically, the colonial context in which mission took place warrants the use of postcolonial criticism as a reading lens. Surprisingly, the words of a missionary furnish an added link between this fragment of the Puerto Rican history and the postcolonial theoretical framework. Inaugurated by Edward Said's groundbreaking critique of the Western invention of the category of the "Orient,"² postcolonial theory becomes explicitly, if fortuitously, summoned to the Puerto Rican scene in a call for the U.S. missionaries to expand their knowledge of the *mind of the people* to be evangelized. "The Latin mind," the missionary explains, "is essentially Oriental."³

1. The idea of this rereading is indebted to the work of Samuel Silva-Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898–1930: Hacia una historia del protestantismo evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997). It has also benefited from the comments of Luis Rivera Pagán.

2. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

3. Robert McLean and Grace Petrie Williams, *Old Spain in New America* (New York: Association Press, 1913), 134.

My use of postcolonial theory is especially influenced by the work of Homi Bhabha, in which the psychoanalytic contributions of Jacques Lacan are brought to bear on the travails of colonial subjectivity.⁴ For Lacan, the formation of the ego is characterized by processes of identification. The ego, he argues, emerges from a person's internalization of external images that it misrecognizes as the self. In contrast to the experienced lack of unity of the self, the image(s) of identification present themselves as totalities, which the subject assumes at the cost of self-alienation. Bhabha argues that, like the processes of ego formation described by Lacan, the identities on which the legitimization of colonial authority rests involve constant misrecognitions of an image for the self. "The question of identification," Bhabha contends, "is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy — it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."⁵ But the image of identity thus assumed is tethered by the image of the Other, and thus its boundaries are dependent upon, and hence threatened by, the Other. As it denies its dependence on the Other, colonial identity is fraught with anxiety and condemned to an obsessive reassertion of its fragile boundary lines. Resorting to the repetition of multiple and incongruent images of self/Other, colonial discourse attempts to mask the perceived fractures in the organizing principles of colonial rule, but unwittingly inscribes its profound uncertainty at the heart of its self-legitimizing pronouncements.

The methodological contributions of postcolonial criticism are complemented and frequently displaced by recent feminist scholarship on the role of gender ideologies in the symbolic systems of dominant modern thinking. In a philosophical tradition that constructed matter and flesh as inferior realms to be controlled by reason, the subordination of women is inscribed in the metaphoric representations of body and the land as

4. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). The use of Lacan's work is potentially problematic if it entails the universalization of psychoanalytic theories deriving from the study of a dominant Western subject. As a tool for the analysis of discourses developed by Western colonizers, however, it seems promising. Lacan's phallocentrism has also been subject to heated debates among feminist scholars. Bhabha's rereading of Lacan, however, seems to open a possibility for reframing the masculinist mode of subject formation that limits Lacan's work along more complex understandings of the impact of social authority in individual subjectivity. For details on the debates and the possible opportunities for critical feminist uses of Lacan see Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

5. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 45.

feminine images and as images of femininity. The stereotypical characterizations of women — as creatures inclined toward materiality rather than spirituality, capriciously driven by emotion more than by reason, passive receptors instead of active producers, naturally depleted of energy, dependent, and infantile — complemented and were complemented by ideas about the nature and body, which were depicted as Other to the male-associated principles of rational order, progress, and culture. The denied dependence of maleness on its Other, of culture on nature, and of reason on the body became a source of anxiety. Maleness was imagined to be threatened by matter and flesh, land and mother.

These gendered representations have theological correlates. The hierarchical dyads — male/female, spirituality/materiality, reason/passion — were imagined to reflect a cosmological one: God, the creator of rational order ruling over his [*sic*] Other — primal matter, represented as dark chaos, that resists and threatens the created order. Chaos and darkness — and the faces associated with them — would then be construed as threats to creation.⁶ The complex web of metaphoric representations and metonymic substitutions generated at the intersections of imperial, theological, and gender imaginaries interweave the representations of otherness within limited and fixed forms of knowledge characteristic of the colonial stereotype.⁷

In the beginning — that summer of 1898 when the American troops entered Puerto Rico — the island was not absolute nothingness. It was not an empty land nor was colonial rule an origin(al) situation. The very name of the island already bore the marks of the greed of conquest. Puerto Rico (*Rich Port*), the Spanish colonizers had named it, thus replacing the formerly also-Spanish naming after San Juan. But this did

6. Catherine Keller's scrutiny of the sources and effects — theological and social — of the theological elimination of the chaos of Gen. 1 and other ancient traditions through the doctrine of ex-nihilo undergirds my interpretation of the use of chaos metaphors in colonial discourses. The darkness of chaos, she explains, became an intolerable trace of otherness for an emerging "Christian imaginary of mastery." Chaos as a complexity inscribed in the beginning of creation — and of theology as well as of every discourse of origin and purity — was the subject of systematic theological and secular erasure, a/nihilation. See Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2002).

7. My use of the term "imaginary" follows Walter Dignolo's definition: "the imaginary of the modern/colonial world is its self-description, the ways in which it described itself through the discourse of the state, intellectuals and scholars." *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 23. For a discussion on the interrelatedness of gender, class, and race on colonial representations see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

not restrain the new colonial power from attempting to erase the past through yet another ritual naming—naming after the colonizing father who declared it had just been born.⁸ “A nation was born in a day, in an hour.”⁹ It was named *Porto Rico*.¹⁰

This naming was followed by a rush of knowledge about the island and its inhabitants. These early objectifying gazes were imprinted in the pages of a number of illustrated books produced to disseminate knowledge about the conquered islands: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The titles are revealing: *Our Islands and Their People* (1899), *Neely's Panorama of Our New Possessions* (1898), and *Our New Possessions* (1898). The repeated possessive “Our” discloses the appropriating zeal of the knowledge enterprise.

The Protestant churches were also eager to grasp the Puerto Rican soil. Even before the United States had declared the war on Spain in 1898, the missionary societies were preparing to enter the new territories.¹¹ The object of conquest was also made an object of mission. As Protestant denominations divided the island's body among themselves for missionary work, they also marked it “Our.” The knowledge accumulated by the churches was disseminated through the publication of missionaries' memoirs and guidelines for missionary work, the titles of which are revealing too: *Our Foreign Missionary Enterprise: United Brethren Mission Study Course*; *Old Spain in New America*; *The Waiting Isles*; *New Day Ascending*; *Kingdom Building in Puerto Rico: A Story of Fifty Years of Christian Service*; *It Came to Pass*.¹² These works, along

8. Luce Irigaray has persuasively argued that the ritual of naming after the father signals a social disavowal of the origin in the maternal body and the appropriation of that role by the male figure. (See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985], 18–24.) In the case of the colonial scene, this translates into the correlate disavowal of the history of the conquered lands entailed in the myth of the empty lands and the appropriation of it by the colonizer. See McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 28–30.

9. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 105.

10. The name “Porto Rico,” the official name given by General Miles on his arrival to the island, was never used by the natives, who continued to use Puerto Rico.

11. The U.S. Protestant churches' newsletters published a number of articles sanctioning the invasion. Northern Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist Episcopal Churches were initially participating. Other denominations joined the missionary work at later dates. See Silva-Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898–1930*, 111–19.

12. J. S. Mills, W. R. Funk, and S. S. Hough, *Our Foreign Missionary Enterprise: United Brethren Mission Study Course* (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1908); McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, issued by Council of Women for Home Missions; Charles S. Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1930), issued by the Northern Baptist Convention; Fred L. Brownlee, Secretary of the American Missionary Association, *New Day Ascending* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1946); C. Manly Morton, *Kingdom Building in Puerto Rico: A Story of Fifty Years of Christian Service* (Indianapolis: United Christian

with the Superintendent's Annual Reports for the Methodist Episcopal Church and their official newsletter, *El Defensor Cristiano*, constitute the textual base of this essay.¹³

IMAGINARY IDENTITIES AND INCONGRUENT DIFFERENCES

Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races and survive the consequences humanly?

—Edward Said

The inhabitants of the world can be divided in two classes: those who have the Bible and those who do not have it.

—*El Defensor Cristiano*, 1904

The U.S. colonial regime “deliberately placed” Puerto Rico at the churches' “doorsteps.”¹⁴ There, the military occupation was invested with a rank of divine history. It was rendered as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy or as the equivalent to the extension of the Roman Empire in the times of the apostle Paul. The invasion “prepared the way for evangelization.”¹⁵ Still, the relationship between occupation and mission was also explained by the inverse logic. That is, not only was the invasion necessary in order for evangelization to occur, but mission was also considered a necessary and integral part of the project of colonization: an “occupation of Porto Rico by Christian forces.”¹⁶ After all, “Was not the protestant religion part of the new order? Were not the ruling classes of America Protestant? Ought not the Porto Ricans to embrace the religion of their liberators as well as other elements of their civilization?”¹⁷

A shared language of conquest and a correlative claim of divine sanction made the *religion of the liberators* and the *other elements of their civilization* almost indistinguishable from each other. Colonization and

Missionary Society, 1949); Edward A. Odell, *It Came to Pass* (New York: Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church, 1952).

13. *The Christian Defendant*. All translations from this newsletter are mine.

14. Morton, *Kingdom Building in Puerto Rico*, 112.

15. Mills, *Our Foreign Missionary Enterprise*, 176; Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 16.

16. Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 22.

17. *Ibid.*, 25.

mission were construed both as signs of election and as acts of compliance with the supreme duty entrusted to the conquering *race*. This bivalent and self-legitimizing conception was systematically articulated by Rev. Dr. Josiah Strong, General Secretary of Missions of the Congregational Church in the United States. In his 1886 treatise, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, he developed, based on prevalent scientific principles and statistical data, the postulate of the U.S. superiority as a manifestation of the nation's providential destiny to rule mankind [*sic*].¹⁸ This commanding position, he argued, gave the U.S. Christians the "opportunity and obligation" to hasten or retard the coming of Christ's kingdom.¹⁹

Thus for the U.S. missionaries, mission was their "God-given duty" to work "for the enlightenment and evangelization of millions of Puerto Ricans."²⁰ It was theirs because "God [had laid] upon the American nation the *imperious duty*, as well as conferred to it, the exceeding honor and privilege of carrying the gospel of the kingdom to all parts of the earth."²¹ *Imperious* as imperial, mission belonged to those who identified with (or mirrored) a discrete image that I will henceforth call *American*.

Numerous sketches of the *American* were drawn in the missionary texts. According to Strong, for instance, the *American* was a new creation, the "new Anglo-Saxon race of the New World" "a more powerful type of man than has hitherto existed" (220). Characterized by his [*sic*] "money-making power," "genius for colonizing," "unequaled energy," "indomitable perseverance," and "personal independence," the *American* excelled "all others in pushing his way into new countries" (221). The *American* was being prepared for the maximum test in the Darwinian imaginary, "the final competition of the races," a contest of "vitality and of civilization," the most probable outcome of which was the "extinction of lower races" (22f).

This typical characterization placed the *American* firmly on the masculine side of its contemporaneous imaginary. As a masculine species, the *American* was the perfect candidate to rule over "lower races," that is,

18. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1891). A second edition was published in 1891. By 1891 the book had sold over 130,000 copies and by 1916 more than 176,000. Multiple articles and even whole chapters had been published in missionaries' newsletters.

19. *Ibid.*, 227.

20. See 1902 and 1909 Yearbook of the Superintendent's Annual Report and Official Minutes of the Porto Rico Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

21. *Year Book* 1909.

over less manly ones. Senator Albert Beveridge made this assumption explicit. In agreement with Strong, the senator argued that compliance with God's plan for the United States required fostering "the disappearance of debased civilizations and decaying races before the higher civilization of the nobler and *more virile types of men*."²² The imagined contest of the races was then a test of virility conceived to mirror nothing less than the cosmological contest to impose order over chaos by the power of domination. Theodore Roosevelt, undoubtedly a main character in this story, argued that the virile *American* had to retain control over Puerto Rico; failing to do so "would be followed by utter *chaos* in the wretched islands themselves. Some *stronger* and *manlier* power would have to step in."²³

Strong, manly, and white. Darkness of skin — symbolically linked to the darkness of chaos — was not to taint the image of the *American*. Hence General James Wilson disallowed black soldiers from the occupation army during the Spanish-American war. The occupation was to include, in Wilson's words, only the "best American whites"²⁴ — an action then reemphasized by the churches' abjection of black missionaries from the mission occupation forces.²⁵

The image of the *American* produced a myriad of discursive "equivalences, samenesses, identities": *American* and Protestant, Christian and Protestant, Progress and Protestantism, Civilization and *American* values, Freedom and Protestantism, and many more.²⁶ Exemplary of these

22. Kevin A. Santiago-Valles, "Subject People" and Colonial Discourses: *Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898–1947* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 63. Likewise, Roosevelt states, "Of course there have been many instances of brutality, cupidity and stupidity by the conquerors, but by and large, the subject nations have benefited. To begin with, in all logic, the conquering nation has been more civilized, *certainly more virile*" (Theodore Roosevelt cited in *ibid.*, 1, emphasis added).

23. *Ibid.*, 74.

24. Nélida Agosto Cintrón, *Religión y cambio social en Puerto Rico (1898–1940)* (Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1996), 59.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 77. These identities are a recurrent feature in the missionaries' writings. The following are typical examples: "The men of importance in *this nation* were, are, and will continue to be *Protestants*" (*Defensor Cristiano*, October 1, 1903). "An anti-clerical government... advances in the road of *culture, industry and progress*" (*Defensor Cristiano*, November 1, 1903). "Do you think that anyone would be satisfied in being ignorant and especially of *Protestantism* when one see this marching with the most *advanced nations* in front of *progress*, while Catholicism remains in the back?" (*Defensor Cristiano*, October 1, 1903). "Hispanic-American republics have not progressed because they have been subject to Papacy" (*Defensor Cristiano*, November 1, 1903). "It is absurd the idea, pursued by some in Puerto Rico, to amalgamate freedom with Roman Catholicism" (*Defensor Cristiano*, January 1, 1905).

doublings is *Year Book's* statement, "Under the protecting folds of the flag we move forward on all lines of activity with that *unrestricted liberty* which is the glory of *our American Christian Protestant civilization*."²⁷

This affirmation, however, also points to the fault lines concealed under the cloak of colonial discourse. The mission field revealed the split of the assumed equivalences at play in their evangelical message. Theirs was a Christianizing mission to a Christian people, an advocacy of democracy to unrepresented colonized subjects, an implementation of religious freedom through the legal restriction of Catholic practices, a separation of Church and State in which Protestant values were construed as the appropriate representation of the State.²⁸ The *unrestricted liberty*, undeniable trait of the *American Christian Protestant civilization*, was disjointed at the mission field.

And "the strategic splitting of the colonial discourse . . . is contained by addressing the other as despot."²⁹ If the missionaries were to occupy this space of total identification with the image of the *American*, an "absolute, undivided, boundless, homogenized despot" had to be found.³⁰ The *American* had to stand facing a stereotypical and antithetical Other. To the traits of this Other image of the colonial imaginary I now turn.

WHO IS THE OTHER?

The modern colonizing imagination conceives of its dependencies as a territory, never as a people. — Sir Herman Merivale, 1839³¹

A bright young girl was sent from Porto Rico to New York to be educated. Shortly after getting fairly settled in school she wrote, "Do you know what they call me here? *Our New Possession*."

— *Old Spain in New America*, 1916

27. *Year Book* 1904, 16; emphasis added.

28. The *Defensor Cristiano* gave its open support to a law project to prohibit processions, which were an important part of the Catholic tradition in the island (January 15, 1905). The Methodist Newsletter also asked for a law project to prohibit "external religious cult" and the ringing of the (Catholic) churches' bells (June 15, 1905).

29. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 98.

30. Ibid. In colonial discourse, however, the need for an absolute Other is undermined by the colonialist demand for the colonized to mimic the colonizer. Numerous examples of the ambivalence arising from this problem of colonial authority (developed prominently by Homi Bhabha) are found in the missionaries' texts. My reading is limited to the fantasies of full identity there attested.

31. Cited in *ibid.*, 97.

The Other of the *American* was not only the *Porto Rican*,³² but also the newly acquired land — a distinction frequently collapsed under the tropes of colonial discourse.³³ Ultimately, the goal of the colonial project was to possess the land, to define *Porto Rico* as a U.S. territory. But to turn a living place into a territory required a forceful denial of the Puerto Ricans' claims to a Puerto Rican land and the disavowal of their ties to a motherland, to past histories, to previous beginnings. Only thus could the *American* stand as the sole creator of a new thing created out of nothing but dust. This denial — sustained by patriarchal fantasies of pure male origination — would soon be haunted by the shadow images of the repressed motherland. The missionaries' depictions of the island wavered between provocative portraits of a paradisiacal land and tenebrous sketches of a dangerous landscape. Attraction and fear were frequently combined in ambiguous expressions, such as the *Year Book's* praising exclamation, "The very heavens seem to catch the witchery of the Island's spell."³⁴ Noticeably confounding land and woman, the missionary found himself trapped in the typical ambivalence toward the female body — mother *and* witch, virgin *and* seducer.

The imagined threat of being caught in the land's spell was clearly expressed in recurring allusions to the effect of climate. Drawing from scientific theories that proposed a direct link between the evolution of races (or lack thereof) and climate, colonial discourse gave the tropical weather a phantasmagoric mystique envisioned as a force haunting even the missionaries. The newly "discovered" land was reviled as more dangerous to health than any other Latin American country, "enervating and weakening . . . to those engaged in mental work," causing the "depletion of nervous energy," having a "relaxing effect" like that of "worldly social influences, and the secular spirit" of inducing "moral laxity."³⁵

32. As with the term "American," I use "Porto Rican" to denote exclusively an image constructed and deployed within the discourses explored in this reading.

33. Efrén Rivera Ramos argues that the legal identity of the Puerto Rican was defined by construing the question as one of the "legal characterization of a locality" and then imposing them as a characterization of the people, and further rendering both people and territory as property, legitimately subjects to the principles of private property (*The Legal Construction of Identity: The Judicial and Social Legacy of American Colonialism in Puerto Rico* [Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001]).

34. *Year Book* 1908. See also McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 107f; Morton, *Kingdom Building in Puerto Rico*, 1f; Odell, *It Came to Pass*, 39f; *Year Book* 1905, 20f; 1906, 24f; 1909, 10f.

35. Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 33; *Defensor Cristiano*, September 1, 1905; *Year Book* 1904; *Year Book* 1903, 16; George Milton Fowles, *Down in Porto Rico* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910), 98.

As a figure of masculinity, however, the *American* was called to protect himself from these feminized influences. Thus, to ward off the threat of being engulfed by the island's climate, the familiar codes of gender hierarchy were reinscribed recurring to the current myth of the virgin land. Discursively erasing as much as four hundred years of history the *Year Book* fantasized: "Porto Rico rests upon the bosom of the tropic seas as beautiful, majestic and fruitful in all its natural gifts as when Columbus first discovered it; *waiting only* the assistance of law, sound government aided by intelligent industry, enterprise and moral transformation."³⁶ *Porto Rico* appears as a beautiful female who invites (and incites) the manly colonizer and waits — docile and available, to be entered, inseminated, and owned. A waiting isle in need of the *American* — indeed a comforting mirage of patriarchal (and colonial) order!³⁷

The figure of a passive land had its correlate in the image of a passive *Porto Rican*. Facing the *American*, colonial discourse placed an image of otherness delineated in reference to land of origin, race, and culture to produce a contrasting picture that was fundamentally fixed and externally determined. The multiple and contradictory characterizations of the *Porto Rican* were homogenized under several organizing categories. For example, after providing an extensive list of differences between the *Porto Rican* and the *American*, a Baptist missionary concludes that they are all "manifestations of a more *fundamental difference* between the *Porto Rican* and the North American. . . . These islanders, *like the rest of their race, are*."³⁸ The so-called race fixed the *Porto Rican* within multiple typologies: "the Spanish," "the Latin mind," "the Catholic," "the Spanish-speaking peoples" — all of them masking any specificity. Even the "Oriental" was casually invoked. The missionary's choice for the fundamental difference is this: they are "*fundamentally emotional* while

36. *Year Book* 1906, 25.

37. The importance of the image of the passive island is evidenced in its use as the title for a Baptist Church's mission's book for the Caribbean: Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*.

38. Arthur James, *Thirty Years in Puerto Rico: A Record of the Progress since American Occupation* (New York: Educational Work Board of Home Missions, 1927), 20, emphasis added. According to James, the *Porto Rican* is "an embodiment of hospitality and courtesy . . . seldom found among the Anglo-Saxons" (14); "possesses a fine idealism, but he seems to lack the ability to put his ideas into reality" (16); shows "appreciation of the abstract" (17); is a "follower rather than leader" (18); is "kind and generous" (18); is "lacking what the Anglo-Saxon considers the first element of a good sport" (29); and is "notoriously individualistic" (23). For a similar representation of the *Porto Rican* see George Milton Fowles, *Down in Porto Rico* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1910), 46.

the continental is unemotional."³⁹ The feminization implied in the emphatic distinction signals once again the intricate relationship between the demarcations of race and gender differences.

To demarcate the *Porto Rican* according to race introduced a peculiar challenge in the ordering structures of U.S. colonial and missionary's discourse. Although the term "race" was used rather loosely to differentiate groups based on a wide range of attributes, skin color retained a privileged place as a marker of race in the colonial tropes.⁴⁰ In contrast with the idea of the homogeneous white *American*, the colonized was neither homogeneously white nor black. Precisely this indecipherability represented a problem in the eyes of an impressive number of missionaries. Robert McLean, for example, states, "The Spaniards did not draw the color line very closely, consequently the population was decidedly mixed both as to color and to blood. *This mixture was bound to cause many complications*."⁴¹ The complications were certainly multiple. A race without a particular color or a people without a race? Unresolved. For if the link between race and color is fractured, how can the *white* define her/himself? If the people did not belong to a particular race, how can they be fixed in the colonial order?⁴²

The undecidability of a race placed in between the assumed black/white ontological divide was soon disavowed through the repetition of stereotypical representations. The black/white dichotomy was used as a

39. James, *Thirty Years in Puerto Rico*, 20.

40. In his Romanes Lecture at Oxford in 1910, for example, Theodore Roosevelt defined the "white race" as "the group of peoples living in Europe, who undoubtedly have a certain kinship of blood, who profess the Christian religion, and trace back their culture to Greece and Rome" (Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956], 27). Another recurrent theme on the characterizations of *races* was language, which was particularly forceful in the missionaries' discourse of Americanization and in the resistance against it. An appropriate elucidation of its complex characteristics is an important aspect of the analysis of the missionary discourses which cannot be included under the scope of the present article.

41. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 106, emphasis added. See also: James, *Thirty Years in Puerto Rico*, 21; Fowles, *Down in Porto Rico*, 20f; Mills, Funk, and Hough, *Our Foreign Missionary Enterprise*, 176; Brownlee, *New Day Ascending*, 73; Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 6.

42. Following McClintock's analysis of sexual surveillance in colonial contexts, it can be argued that the constant search for the "color line" as a boundary between races indicates the colonial anxiety about the integrity of the *American* as a race in the face of the threat of miscegenation. This fear typically triggers a sense of urgency to control women's sexuality as the site of potential racial contamination. The centrality that the missionaries gave to church's implementation and control of marriage attest to this. Through this anxiety, concerns regarding race become the driving force for the surveillance of sexual practices. The categories of gender and race interwove again.

sign that the reader was supposed to understand — “common knowledge” in colonial discourse.⁴³ A missionary describes a new convert as “a Negro, a very handsome man, *large and powerful*.”⁴⁴ Meanwhile another missionary describes a group of listeners as “all white,” and — in precise stereotypical correspondence — he adds, “Many of them wore shoes and stockings, their hair was combed, and their dresses cleaned and ironed stiff as boards.”⁴⁵ All white? White skins or white masks?

The flaunted shoes and dresses, along with other signs of civility, would be summoned to cover up the lack of the color line. With the warrants of scientific objectivity, photography became the ideal tool for producing a unified image of otherness out of competing signifiers of color, class, gender, culture — to name just a few.⁴⁶ The 1906 *Year Book* furnishes a typical example.

Under the heading: “Two pictures in contrast: Let them teach the lesson of our need,” the *Year Book* drew the line. The text that frames the pictures claimed to be interested in the “civilizing and progressive influences” of the “true gospel.” But the images clearly racialized the implied effects. The first photograph is labeled: “They need the Gospel: A group of Porto Rican children that know nothing of the Bible or the true Christ. Truly.” It displays a group of dark-skinned children.⁴⁷ The primitive status with which Western dominant thought associated their skin color is reinforced by the picture’s setting; most of the children are half naked and standing against a background of wild vegetation.

The second photograph — described as: “A Sunday School Parade: A Group of Porto Rican Children that Together with Parents and Teachers have come under the Christianizing, civilizing and progressive influences of protestant Christianity” — stages a model of the civilized white (or its mimic). People are wearing impeccable white suits and long dresses, walking down the streets of the capital city. Besides the relegation of darkness to past stages of progress and to lower attainments in redemption, these pictures disclose other associations as well. For instance, the absence of adults in the first picture reinforces the typical infantilization

43. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 78.

44. Odell, *It Came to Pass*, 18.

45. Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 35.

46. The missionaries carried cameras when traveling, and many pictures of the natives appeared, for example, in every issue of the Methodist Episcopal Church Year Book. See *Year Book* 1906, 31.

47. In fact, the same picture is used in *Down in Puerto Rico*, in that case labeled simply as “Group of Colored Children,” while the second picture is identified as “Public School Parade.”

of the natives. Furthermore, because of their poor clothing, the gender difference between the children seems to blur. In contrast, the second group reflects the expected family composition, including men, women, and children, and their clothing clearly adheres to the accepted codes of gender distinctiveness. In one and the same image, the *Porto Rican* is represented as black, poor, infantile, and inadequately gendered; all features tightly intertwined as one indivisible difference. Meanwhile, the *American Protestant* way is proposed as a redemptive force capable of saving the *Porto Rican*, even from blackness. Almost, but not quite.

In terms of culture and religion, the *Porto Rican* was depicted as a passive receptor of Spain’s culture, a subject overdetermined by a stereotypical image of *Spain*. For a definition of the Puerto Rican culture the missionary turned to Spain. Evidently, this *Spain* was an image fixed in the past, a country of the Middle Ages. *Old Spain in New America*, the revealing title of a mission’s textbook, conveys this “static vision of ‘synchronic essentialism,’ ” which marked the constructions of the *Porto Rican*.⁴⁸

Deemed as a *product of Spanish activity*, the Puerto Ricans’ agency in the creation or development of their own culture and religiosity was disavowed.⁴⁹ It is not surprising, then, that the missionaries’ discourse lacked a distinction between the institutional Roman Catholic Church and popular religion. The syncretistic practices of Puerto Rican religiosity, which incorporated aspects of Spiritism, religions of the natives, and African religions, were sometimes accepted and other times severely criticized by the institutional Catholic Church. The missionaries’ attacks against them were, however, directed against Spain or the Catholic Church. This does not mean that the syncretistic practices were unacknowledged. On the contrary, this hybridity was used to justify the

48. Said, *Orientalism*, 240. Walter Mignolo has argued for a distinction between two modern/colonial phases: the first extending from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century in which Spain and Portugal figured as the centers of Europe. Judaism, Islam, and the Amerindian religions were the *Others* to be extirpated. In the second phase, marked by the Enlightenment and the Industrial revolution, Britain, France, and eventually the United States claimed their place at the center of the “Western” world. The *Others* were then increasingly marked by racial rhetoric. The missionaries’ texts examined also show a redrawing of the borders of Christianity to allow the Catholic to become *Other*.

49. For example, the Mexicans (labeled the “Spanish population in the United States”) were described as “the *product of Spanish activity* in exploration and colonization in the sixteenth century, and the character and condition of the people must be interpreted in the light of the character, teachings, and conditions of *that age*” (Detweiler, *The Waiting Isles*, 24, emphasis added). The same was assumed to be the case of the Puerto Ricans. See also *ibid.*, 21.

evangelization of Christian countries, arguing that the Catholic missionaries had "committed the fatal error of adapting Christian worship to the beliefs and practices of pagan tribes. Instead of Christianizing paganism, they allowed their Christianity to become paganized."⁵⁰ Unlike the *American* — the accusation implied — the *Spanish* colonizer/evangelizer failed to protect Christianity from the pagan Other.

The absolute boundary between the Christian and the pagan Other could not be compromised; the "rules of recognition" had to be redrawn, this time leaving the Catholic outside. Hence, churches' newsletters devoted more space to the contrast between the *Catholic* and the *Protestant* than to any other subject. Every two weeks the essential differences would be "anxiously repeated," "as if [the ignorance, superstition, materialism, backwardness, and idolatry of the *Catholic*] that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved."⁵¹ The final verdict was, "Romanism is the enemy of Protestantism, because the latter teaches the principles of the Gospel, the doctrines of Christ."⁵² Thus, Catholicism was excluded from true Christianity and included in the broad category of the *Bible-lacking people*.

Like the race line, the boundary between the *Bible-lacking people* (Catholics included) and the Protestants was supported with signs of power and progress. The indicators of economic progress produced by the U.S. colonial government were lifted as evidence of the U.S./Protestant superiority against the backdrop of the Spain/Catholic backwardness.⁵³ *Bible-lacking people*, it was claimed, were marked by "ignorance, poverty, degradation, oppression, unrest," their countries "lacking inventions, popular education and the modern advances"; while the people who had the Bible — that is, the Protestants — were

characterized by "education, intelligence and the prosperity of their country."⁵⁴

The guarded frontier between the Catholic Other and the Protestant was another site of anxiety. Identified as it was with the project of progress of the emerging industrial era, Protestantism struggled to create itself in ways that were congruent to the values of that time. It has been argued that modern representations of the Eastern traditions — *Bible-lacking people* — intended to subordinate or exclude aspects of the Christian traditions by projecting them into Other religious traditions.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the appropriation of *Christian* to denote exclusively the Protestant tradition and the constant depiction of Catholicism as external (rather than spiritual), emotional, material, irrational, unpractical, and uncivilized, U.S. Protestant discourse tried to purge itself from those elements of the Christian tradition that were perceived as being in tension with post-Enlightenment modernity's narratives of rational power and progress. These rejected elements were, predictably, feminized.

Through a rather disjointed combination of imagined identities and incongruent differences, missionary texts attempted to protect the boundaries of a self-image that was dependent upon its Other — *Porto Rican*, *Spanish*, *Catholic*, *Latin*, etc. This discursive protection of this intrinsically split identity demanded a continuous repetition of differences and images to mask the lack of equivalence between the missionary and the *American*, between the evangelized and the *Porto Rican*, between mission and redemption, and ultimately between God and its images.

BETWEEN GOD AND THE OTHER

Difficult is the task to effect the evangelization of centuries oppressed people. Here a false religion has done its worst. These *dark places of the earth* were full of habitations of cruelty... Puerto Rico shall yet be redeemed.

— *Year Book* 1905

50. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, xiii. "From the evangelical point of view the principal reason that Roman Catholicism falls short of ministering to the spiritual needs of the Porto Rican is because of the superstitious practices it sanctions in the name of religion" (James, *Thirty Years in Puerto Rico*, 30).

51. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 66.

52. *Defensor Cristiano*, November 1, 1903.

53. The following are just a few examples of this association, "Nothing gives our work in Roman Catholic countries such influence as well located and attractive looking church buildings" (*Year Book* 1905, 23). "Around this Santurce church there is a compact colony of Presbyterians and it is interesting to see their growth in cleanliness, the increasing comfort and beauty of their homes" (Odell, *It Came to Pass*, 23). "An anti-clerical government... advances in the road of culture, industry and progress" (*Defensor Cristiano*, November 1, 1903). "Do you think that anyone would be satisfied in being ignorant and especially of Protestantism when one sees this marching with the most advanced nations in front of progress, while Catholicism remains in the back?" (*Defensor Cristiano*, October 1, 1903).

54. *Defensor Cristiano*, December 1, 1904. The statement further argues that, "Prisons, shelters for the poor, refuge homes, and orphanages where the sons of the dumb, degraded, and abandoned hide, all these institutions are generally full of people who do not know about divine revelation, but were, on the contrary, raised in darkness." Correspondingly, McLean and Williams assert, "The religious faith of a nation largely determines its progress and destiny" (xiii).

55. See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and "the Mystical East"* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

The people are being *disarmed* of their suspicions, freed from many superstitions, broadened in their views of life, *infused* with lofty ideals and frequently 'tis now ours to see them *melted* and utterly *subdued* by the love of Christ.
— *Year Book* 1908

Wherever God is there is imperialism.

— *El Defensor Cristiano*, 1909

Mission was conceived through ideas of redemption as new creation. Creation from nothing—*ex-nihilo*? Certainly the colonial imaginary attempted to erase the Puerto Rican history as nothing. Only thus could occupation be construed as an absolute origin. In this schema, the *Porto Rican* was imagined as a passive receptacle, little more than inert stuff in which climate, race, and culture stamped their forms. But the missionary faced another reality—that of an evangelized who resisted the missionary attempts to re-form it. The supposed *nothing* of a Puerto Rican past was then construed as the image of chaos—“rebellious wickedness worthy of annihilation—and therefore already as nothing at all, invisible in the outer darkness of its exclusion.”⁵⁶ Thus, U.S. colonial enterprise wavered between the disavowal of the Puerto Rican history and agency, and its recognition displaced in discourse as the return of the monstrous chaos that had to be controlled—order had to be imposed over the lower (and dark) forces that constantly threatened it. “God had made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns...,” announced a U.S. senator. “He had made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples.”⁵⁷

The land was a preferred site for the battles to impose control over chaos, and an ideal monument to the victories attained through the

56. Keller, *The Face of the Deep*. The discursive rendering as *nothing* as a precondition for concrete annihilation is evident also in Daisy Machado's words regarding the genocide of Native Americans: “The creation of a ‘chosen’ nation to be possessed by a chosen people necessitated a virgin land. God needed a ‘clean slate,’ the value and importance of the people already there had to be eliminated... When thousands of Native Americans died on this terrible journey [Trail of Tears]... the fact that they had been categorized as lacking in worth, as destined to eventual extermination, transformed their deaths into further proof of their unworthiness to possess the land” (“La Otra América—The Other America,” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernández and Fernando F. Segovia [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001], 225).

57. Senator Albert Beveridge before fully assembled Senate, 1900. Cited in Santiago-Valles, “Subject People” and Colonial Discourses, 26.

imposition of technological order. In his 1916 book, written in the context of the “national pride in the physical achievement of a completed Panama Canal,” Robert McLean begins by lifting up the North American West as proof of the *redemptive* work already achieved by the United States.

The early maps of the United States showed west of the Missouri River a vast stretch of country extending to and beyond the Rockies marked “The Great American Desert.” The steady *progress of civilization has redeemed that desert* and it is now the great granary of the North American continent. The utilization of the streams, the opening of the fountains held in reserve by the bountiful Creator, and the planting of forests to conserve the rainfall, have made the “desert” the happy dwelling place of throngs of prosperous people.⁵⁸

The West redeemed by the god of progress—dwelling place of the prosperous—was also envisioned as Isaiah's new earth and evoked in Edward Odell's celebratory account of the accomplishments in Puerto Rico:

Puerto Rico today... is not the Puerto Rico of fifty years ago. ... Harbors have transformed the shoreline, large waterways and power plants have *altered* and *harnessed* the rivers, highways have *penetrated* the mountains, extensive airfields have *leveled* the landscape in the environs of large cities; factories, industrial plants, and factory-made houses have transformed suburban pastures into cities. ... It's not the same old place.⁵⁹

The triumphant tone of these passages fails to conceal the violence implied in the gendered fantasies of domination—to *harness*, *penetrate*, and *possess*—that linked the *redemption* of Puerto Rico to the conquest of the West. The desiring gazes at the Puerto Rican land were soon followed by the greed for possession—“its hills and mountains can be cultivated *to the very limits of productiveness*,” the “*barren* places will

58. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, v, 3, emphasis added. Observe the continuity with Strong's description of “Western supremacy” (Strong, *Our Country*, 31).

59. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 51; Odell, *It Came to Pass*, 47; emphasis added.

become the most productive."⁶⁰ With technological weapons the *American* could indeed create a new land flowing with milk and honey under the power of the spirit. The spirit of progress, that is. "May the *spirit of true progress* carry on the work and *preserve our identity* in the great world of Christian thought and action so that at last we may give to the future the rich legacy of a redeemed land."⁶¹

The creation of the new (subject) land also entailed the creation of a new (subject) people. The *Porto Rican* was expected to passively receive new form — to satisfy the colonial "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other."⁶² In this *New Creation* a creator replaced the Creator. In fact, a previous creator had been sent — a Spanish colonizer/evangelizer had also "possessed *splendid material* [the Latin race] upon which to build a strong and progressive civilization."⁶³ But the Spanish creator had allowed himself [*sic*] to become contaminated in blood and in religion. It had not *preserved its identity*. A new, manlier creator was needed.

Despite the apparent de-formation caused by the old culture and religion, and the supposed natural inferiority of their race, the Puerto Rican was assumed to be at least partly re-formable. The missionaries' work could create a "loftier race than the Latin world hath ever known," "sturdy, and energetic."⁶⁴ A new race, created in whose image?

Porto Rico is ours. . . . Let Porto Rico become the best and truest reflection of ourselves. . . . Never before in American history was such an opportunity and such a material given from which could be carved character and Christ's likeness.⁶⁵

Not surprisingly, in this new creation story the human being is created in the image of the *American* missionary. *Porto Rico* and the *Porto Rican* become only material — dark matter of tropical earth, dark (or deceptively fair) skin of the native people — out of which a new image would be carved. This "passive and malleable" mass could be created and molded, and the "American spirit inspired in [it]."⁶⁶ In a remarkable

60. Morton, *Kingdom Building in Puerto Rico*, 108; emphasis added.

61. *Year Book* 1905, 30; emphasis added.

62. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

63. McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 19.

64. *Year Book* 1910, 15; McLean and Williams, *Old Spain in New America*, 109.

65. *Year Book* 1909, 18.

66. "If the schools are Americanized and the *American spirit is inspired* in the professors and the students . . . , sympathy, points of view and the attitudes to life and to the government will become essentially American. The great mass of Puerto Ricans is still *passive* and *malleable*."

sleight of hand the *Christ likeness* of the missionaries' imaginary is given a concrete form, the *truest reflection* of the *American*.

The trinity of male power is now complete: the white male creator, the *American* Christ, and the Spirit of Progress; the whole divine trinity completely removed, wholly Other, to the land and to the native peoples.

CONCLUSION

Why are we here again? Why rehearse once more the words of an unfortunate past instead of dismissing them as a crude sample of colonial non-sense? "For the critique must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented past that haunts the historical present."⁶⁷ The purpose of this critique, however, is not to offer yet another description of "the Puerto Rican" or to pretend to purify our theological heritage from the touch of the *American* Other — such projects would only mimic the colonial enterprise, even if done with the purpose of reversing its hierarchies.

The aim of this critical engagement is rather to uncover and challenge the fundamental logic that supports relations of subordination in its multiple manifestations: as hierarchies of gender, race, culture, religion, nature, etc. — to open spaces for theological frameworks that can truly promote liberation for all. How does God create? Does creation entail the annihilation of the *old* on behalf of the *new*, of darkness on behalf of lightness? Are absolute control and order signs of God's creativity? How does the Spirit relate to matter, to nature? How do we envision God's image, in what color, in what gender? Proposing alternative answers to these questions lies ahead in the development of Latina and Latino theologies that realize *the unspoken, unrepresented past that haunt the historical present* in their striving to forge new visions of a redeeming future.

Their ideals are in our hands to *create and mold them*." "Report on Public Schools of Puerto Rico, by the President of the Board of Education," Víctor Clark, in the report of the Brigadier General Geo. W. Davis, 1899. Cited in Silva-Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898–1930*, 283. The re-formation in terms of which new creation was understood adhered to the entailed putting "the conscience of the American people into the islands of the sea."

67. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 12.