

Coloniality of anti-corruption: Whiteness, disasters, and the US anti-corruption policies in Puerto Rico

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of ‘coloniality of anti-corruption’ to help situate and describe contemporary US anti-corruption policies aimed at Puerto Rico. The aim of the concept of coloniality of anti-corruption is to underscore corruption’s inextricable relationship to race, class, gender, and other colonial power relations. The article argues that US interventions with the Puerto Rican government, along with its distribution of disaster relief in the wake of Hurricane María (2017) and subsequent earthquakes (2020), are best understood against the backdrop of a long history of corruption narrative implemented by the US. This is a narrative that seeks to legitimate US’s colonial and capitalist expansion in Puerto Rico. To demonstrate this, the article explores the application of anti-corruption narratives by the Trump administration to justify its disaster relief policies for Puerto Rico. In particular, the article focuses on Trump’s tweets describing Puerto Rican politicians as ‘corrupt’ and Puerto Rico as ‘geography of fraud.’ In doing so, the article provides a theoretical account of the uses of corruption and anti-corruption discourses to justify colonial and capitalist’s global endeavors. It also illustrates how anti-corruption policies reproduce the idea of the non-white other as the corrupt subject and denotes the humanitarian consequences of such policies.

Keywords

corruption, Donald Trump and Puerto Rico, natural disasters, sociology of law, whiteness

Introduction

This article proposes the concept of coloniality of anti-corruption to describe how colonialism and whiteness have configured contemporary US anti-corruption narratives and policies in Puerto Rico (henceforth PR). PR, an unincorporated territory (or colony) of the US since 1898,¹ has been dealing with a multilayered sociolegal, political, economic, and humanitarian crisis since at least 2006. From the public debt crisis in 2006; the PR

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government's bankruptcy in 2016; the legislation of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA)² and the imposition of a Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) by the US Congress in 2016; the devastating Hurricanes Irma and María in 2017, and Fiona in 2022; a series of earthquakes in 2020; to the COVID-19 pandemic, PR's recent history has been defined by sociolegal, political, and economic crises, corruption cases, and anti-corruption policies.

At every stage of this multilayered crisis, corruption and anti-corruption narratives have been instrumentalized by the US federal government to deny access to disaster relief funds and impose additional oversights and legal limitations on the autonomy of PR's government. These anti-corruption discourses served to blame Puerto Ricans for their own suffering, rather than addressing the institutional racism and enduring colonial governance structures that render Puerto Ricans as less deserving of federal government support.

Focusing on the case of PR and the anti-corruption narratives implemented by Donald Trump's administration as a paradigmatic example of the intertwined relation between colonialism, whiteness, and corruption, this article argues that corruption narratives are inextricably tied to race, class, gender, and colonial relations of power. It does so by looking at the use of corruption narratives to describe PR, and Puerto Rican politicians in the wake of Hurricane María (2017) and the series of earthquakes affecting the southwestern region of the island since 2020. Racialized recoveries in the wake of governance failures are not new. For example, there is prolific literature on political corruption in the aftermath of disasters (Escaleras & Register, 2016; Green & Ward, 2004; Wenzel, 2021). This literature has critically engaged with issues surrounding aid relief, disaster capitalism, and colonial and racist definitions of corruption in the global south. This article aims to contribute to this scholarship and to the development of a critical sociology of corruption by bringing whiteness into the colonial critique of anti-corruption initiatives.

Thus, by further focusing on Trump's administration,³ the article shows how corruption occupied a central role with respect to how communities of color were discursively created through Trump's public rhetoric, which in turn served as a means of denying access to disaster and recovery relief funds. This article argues that Trump's anti-corruption narratives are reflective of a long colonial, capitalist, and racialized system of governance imposed by the US on PR. That is, Trump's white supremacist anti-corruption narratives unravel the ideological foundations by which the colonial state operates in PR.

As Pulido et al. (2019) argue, Trump's spectacular racism obscures the policies implemented in maintaining structures of racial inequality and white supremacy. In their study, Pulido et al. (2019, p. 521) show that Trump's spectacular racism drew massive media attention because of its transgressive nature, whereas his environmental agenda attracted far less scrutiny, as was also the case of corruption and anti-corruption narratives in PR. While Trump's tweets drew attention to his racist views on Puerto Rican colonial subjects, they obscured the painful policies implemented to 'prevent corruption' in the recovery and reconstruction funds. Consequently, by nurturing whiteness *via* spectacular racism, Trump paved the way for dehumanizing policies, in which colonial, racialized, and gendered subjects are not worthy of full legal and moral consideration. Indeed, they are arguably mere pawns in Trump's political machinations (Pulido et al., 2019, p. 522).

In my data collection, I used *Factba.se*,⁴ and the *Trump Twitter Archive*,⁵ which contain every public declaration made by the former president Donald Trump. I focused on Trump's declarations on the US unincorporated territories, where I found: 488 results for PR; 46 for Guam; 40 for US Virgin Islands; 1 for American Samoa; and 1 for Northern Marianas. Out of these declarations, I focused on Twitter, not only because former president Trump was well known for his tweets, but because it also provided a short and direct messaging. Other scholars have conducted similar analysis of Trump's uses of Twitter (Bodnar, 2019; Coe & Griffin, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Schertzer & Woods, 2021). This research focused on statements where Trump uses the term corruption, corrupt, and/or directed corruption allegations at Puerto Rican politicians (18 tweets out of 62). No declarations or anti-corruption narratives for the other four unincorporated territories were found in these databases. This is supplemented by critical policy analysis of the anti-corruption and corruption practices focused on PR post Hurricane Maria.

This article is divided into two parts. The first provides a discussion of the field of sociology of corruption and lays down a critique to the global north anti-corruption narratives, and develops the concept of coloniality of anti-corruption, by showing the intertwined relationship between colonialism, law, whiteness, and corruption. The second part provides a brief overview of the Puerto Rican history before introducing the analysis of the Trump public narrative about corruption in PR and discussion of some of the policies limiting the uses of the disaster recovery and relief funds. The article demonstrates how, in PR, corruption has been inextricably tied to racialized, gendered, and classed processes of colonization and capitalist dominations. Thus, producing a coloniality of anti-corruption.

Critical sociology of anti-corruption

There is abundant criminological, political science, public administration and public policy research on corruption, anti-corruption, and the role of transnational organizations in promoting anti-corruption legislation and reforms (Brown & Cloke, 2006). This scholarship has broadly defined corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Key in the development of policies and legal reforms have been transnational organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), among others. Similarly, transnational NGOs, like Transparency International, have contributed to the popularization of the definitions of corruption, quantification, indexation, and the promotion of anti-corruption policies and legal reform among global south countries ranked as corrupt.

Fighting corruption has become equated with development, modernization, and more importantly, democratic governance. Thus, fighting corruption reflects a widely accepted four-pronged approach to anti-corruption involving public education, prevention, investigation, and prosecution. Furthermore, the most common anti-corruption policies recommended by transnational organizations include asset and interest declarations; beneficial ownership; transparency in political financing; whistleblowing; transparency in lobbying; and open contracting.

Several scholars have questioned these conceptualizations of corruption and anti-corruption policies by pointing out the neoliberal, colonial, and neocolonial agenda, and

the methodological and epistemic flaws of this scholarship (Brown & Cloke, 2006; De Maria, 2008; Murphy & Brindusa, 2018; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2021; Whyte, 2007b). This article engages and follows this critical scholarship and aims to contribute to the development of the emerging field of global south sociology and sociolegal studies of corruption, by developing the concept of coloniality of anti-corruption. Hence, coloniality of anti-corruption entails a critical approach to the knowledge and policies produced by transnational organizations that insist on labeling global south and racialized communities as corrupt.

It is important to note that sociological engagement with corruption has been limited. As Osrecki (2017) has shown, sociological engagement with corruption has been largely defined by functionalist approaches and developmental theories. In his historical overview, Osrecki (2017) has demonstrated that the sociological study of corruption has, to a great extent, comprised economic models and quantitative approaches, which emphasized on numerically comparing, correlating, and ranking corruption. For Osrecki (2017) this has led to a loss in counter-intuitive analysis of corruption, resulting in an ‘anti-corruption discourse that builds its legitimacy not on creative ways of dealing with the social world, but on the technicality of measuring the obvious’ (Osrecki, 2017, p. 122).

Similarly, Zaloznaya (2013, 2017) has demonstrated that corruption has not received adequate attention in comparative sociology and in sociolegal studies. Zaloznaya (2013, 2017) argues that the lack of sociological studies of corruption has generated an understanding of this phenomenon that inaccurately describes the reasons and consequences of corruption. Furthermore, these limited understandings of corruption have become part of what Sampson (2010) has called anti-corruptionism or the anti-corruption industry. The anti-corruption industry refers to the transnational movements coordinated by western business and political elites and carried out by international and local NGOs, national governments, and grassroots organizations. Sampson (2010) has demonstrated how the anti-corruption industry is an ever-expanding field of opportunities in which anti-corruption programs enable the anti-corruption industry to coexist along with the corruption it ostensibly is combating.

Zaloznaya (2013) provides an excellent critique of the methodological approaches implemented by ‘anti-corruptionism,’ as permeated with inaccurate and profoundly non-sociological assumptions. Accordingly, anti-corruptionism is largely based on three problematic methodological and epistemic assumptions.

First, corruption is a deviation from the rational-legal bureaucratic context, uniformly detrimental to the moral fabric of a society. Zaloznaya (2013) points out that conceptualization of bureaucracy as a mode of social organization is foreign to many non-western societies. These societies are often characterized by underdefined and flexible boundaries between private and public spheres, and a spillover of kin obligations, spirituality, and other private rationales into public domains. Zaloznaya (2013) develops the principle of embeddedness and invites sociologists to focus on understanding how the context and local knowledge determine whether a practice is received as corrupt.

Second, for anti-corruptionism, corruption is motivated by an instrumental calculus (Zaloznaya, 2013). As a primarily economic movement, anti-corruptionism embraces a utilitarian model of action that assumes that behavioral choices reflect actors’ cost-and-benefit calculus. Based on this body of research that links corruption to poor economic

performance and weak democratic institutions, the WB and other international financial institutions (IFIs) have declared corruption the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development worldwide (Zaloznaya & Reisinger, 2020, p. 78). As a result, IFIs currently invest significant amounts of time and effort on initiatives that are not fundamentally different from colonialism (Whyte, 2007b).

According to Whyte (2007b), anti-corruption policies play a central role in neoliberalism and in the financialization of the economy. Furthermore, development aid has been largely based on the imposition of anti-corruption policies foreign to the global south countries (David-Barrett & Fazekas, 2020). Anti-corruption reforms in this manner are used prescriptively as a precondition to grant aid, debt relief, economic development packages, or membership to international bodies (Whyte, 2007b).

Third, for anti-corruptionism, corruption is bad, and absence of corruption is good. This approach, as Zaloznaya (2013) shows, lacks nuance, complexity, and a concrete understanding of localized power. Perhaps one of the most consistent critiques to this approach is the hyper-emphasis on surveying, indexing, and comparing the degree of corruption in each country *a la* Corruption Perception Index (Andersson & Heywood, 2009). Methodologically, the index-based studies use homogenized indicators to analyze corruption, which favors global north countries, while undermining global south countries. This results in pre-made homogeneous anti-corruption reform packages that are applied indiscriminately in sociological and political contexts.

Taking into consideration critiques of the anti-corruption industry, and the substantial critical scholarship on corruption, this article aims to sketch a critical understanding of anti-corruption from the standpoint of global south, colonial, and racialized communities. Corruption narratives have direct ontological implication going beyond policy and having direct impact on the national identity (Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2021). This article engages with critical scholarship that has, for a long time, tried to unsettle the anti-corruption industry and the above described 'normative' study of corruption. Thus, it aims to articulate a critical analysis that demonstrates the implications of coloniality of anti-corruption and to contribute to the development of a critical sociology of corruption. That is, it elucidates the connection between coloniality, whiteness, law, and corruption, and what anti-corruption discourses uncover. It is precisely in this context that Trump's colonial and white supremacist anti-corruption discourses about PR become illustrative. In what follows I conceptualize the key elements of coloniality of anti-corruption, and demonstrate how corruption is tied to race, class, gender, and other power relations.

Coloniality of anti-corruption: Colonialism, whiteness, and the non-western other

This article adopts a similar definition to Doshi and Ranganathan's (2019b, p. 68), whereby corruption is not viewed as a set of fixed practices but rather invoked as 'an interpretive rubric that serves to make sense of and distinguish what is ethical or not, what is harmful or not, and what matters or not (and to whom) in the ordinary processes of wealth accumulation and dispossession that define capitalism as we know it.' Doshi and Ranganathan (2019b, p. 69) further note that 'corruption is a capacious and slippery

language put to a variety of opportunistic uses. Ironically, talk of corruption may be wielded by those who are most guilty of it.’ It is under this rubric of the malleable nature of corruption that Doshi and Ranganathan (2019a, p. 448) propose a working definition of corruption as a ‘normative discourse about the abuse of entrusted power and resulting social decay that are always implicitly positioned relative to a perceived normal or previously “uncorrupted” state of affairs.’ By entrusted power, they mean ‘more than just power held by the state, but also mean power held by private or blurred public-private authorities that ostensibly serve a public purpose’ (2019a, p. 448). Furthermore, they suggest that ‘corruption should be understood first and foremost as a shifting and situated discourse that is yoked to symbolic, material, and territorial power relations and contestations in late capitalism’ (Doshi & Ranganathan, 2019a, p. 437). Following this description of corruption, the present article shows how colonialism and whiteness sit at the root of US anti-corruption policies in PR.

Colonization is always-already a racialized and gendered process and is impacted by racial and gender hierarchies and social structures imported both from the metropole and the existing colonized territory. According to Maldonado (2007) coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that defined culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration. Maldonado (2007) further points out that coloniality has three core manifestations: coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Maldonado (2007, p. 257) develops the concept of coloniality of being, arguing that it appears in historical projects and ideas of civilization which advance colonial projects of various kinds inspired or legitimized by the idea of race. The coloniality of being in turn produces the ontological colonial difference, deploying a series of fundamental existence characteristics and symbolic realities (Maldonado, 2007, p. 252). Corruption narratives serve as ontological colonial differences, in which the non-western other is categorized as inherently corrupt. It is under such racialized understandings that colonies and colonized people are constructed as corrupt.

Corruption discourses, and descriptions of colonial territories and subjects as corrupt, are a constitutive part of western colonialism (Apata, 2019; Go, 2000; Pertiwi & Ainsworth, 2021). Muir and Gupta (2018, p. s6) argue that corruption, as a key category of modern political economy, typically indexes the nonmodern. Similarly, Haller and Shore (2005) point out that ideas of corruption and economic backwardness have consistently featured in imperialist and racialized historical narratives that invoke the primitiveness of less-developed states in order to justify colonial interventions. Thus, corruption narratives were, and continue to be, a key technology for justifying the colonialism of non-western societies.

In this colonial narrative of the corrupt other, western rule of law and ‘democratization’ are bestowed as anti-corruption technologies for the colonies (Saha, 2013). Colonial and postcolonial countries are often described as disorganized, lacking the legal institutions needed to maintain order, and unable to prevent corruption. In the colonial anti-corruption narrative, lacking bureaucratic liberal institutions, the rule of law, market economy, and a strong private sector are almost always equated with corruption (Whyte, 2007a, 2007b). Mattei and Nader (2008) argue that the imposition of western ‘rule of law’ in colonial contexts is viewed as the best alternative to counteract corruption, and

promote transparency and political stability. Anti-corruption technology has played an essential role in legitimizing and normalizing the corruption of the powerful (Whyte, 2007b), thus creating a legal framework permitting plundering, wealth extraction, and dispossession of colonial subjects. Thus, the rule of law, while criminalizing and imposing strong sanctions on individual forms of corruption, is also legalizing and normalizing the corruption of the powerful (Green & Ward, 2004; Whyte, 2007a). This knowledge of corruption and the configuration of a national identity, or colonial subject as corrupt became central in Trump's discourse about PR.

Colonial anti-corruption narratives have mutated together with global capitalist dynamics and economic policies, becoming part of the hegemonic global economic system, institutionalized by the history of colonization and sustained by the structural forces of capitalism. That is, corruption has been key to the historical transformation of the global capitalist framework, from colonialism to neoliberal globalization. This shows that the dialectic of corruption and anti-corruption is in constant motion, as each anti-corruption effort transforms the logic of corrupt practices, and each corrupt practice calls forth new kinds of anti-corruption measures.

Muir and Gupta (2018, p. s11) have also shown that 'perception of corruption can map all too easily onto longstanding racialized sociodemographic distinctions of development and modernity. Racialized distinctions can also play out in the intimate spaces of everyday life.' Ranganathan and Doshi (2017) have previously shown that the 'corruption narrative powerfully harnesses different worldviews, including those deriving from political and economic ideologies, as well as those based on bigotry, patriarchy, and xenophobia.' Following critical race theorists, Ranganathan and Doshi (2017) emphasize that 'whiteness is a foundational system of laws, ideas, economic relations, and cultural normative codes that normalizes racial and economic hierarchy.' They further argue that 'whiteness is a form of amnesia that erases the processes of racial capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy in which racialized dispossession is embedded' (Ranganathan & Doshi, 2017).

Similarly, Bonds and Inwood (2021) argue that whiteness is not simply a racial identity or category, but a relation that produces differential life chances and material advantages. Despite whiteness and colonialism shaping the way in which scholars, policy makers, and politicians think and talk about corruption, these factors remain largely unaddressed. This contradictory engagement with corruption, paired with legacies of race-blind or race-neutral assumptions of sociological theory and research, produces an epistemic regimen in which whiteness, patriarchy, and colonialism underline and shape sociology, but they are rarely openly acknowledged as central.

The whiteness of anti-corruption narratives becomes clear when looking at the long history of racialized, gendered, and colonial processes that helped codify certain criminal or administrative offenses as corrupt. This includes clientelism, patrimonialism, nepotism, and patronage and their historical association with non-white politicians or public servants in the global south. Concepts such as state capture, narco-state, and kleptocracies are often instrumentalized (and reserved) to describe global south states. Moreover, when NGOs, the OECD, and Transparency International (and other international organizations) discuss corruption and offshore financial centers, tax havens, and illicit financial flow, they often refer to the global south and Caribbean colonized territories as primary

examples. Yet, critical scholars have shown the City of London, the US, and Luxembourg are key players in these dynamics of tax evasion (Shaxson, 2019). Likewise, global north scholars and policy makers often discuss, anecdotally, how transnational corporations must have a separate budget to pay bribes or kickback if they wish to conduct business in the global south. When corruption scandals break out in the news, such as Odebrecht, the Panama Papers, or the Pandora Papers, these stories were framed as having their cause in some corrupt individuals or failed states in the global south. There is no discussion of how these global and transnational corruption cases are largely tied to, and often the result of, the global north tax and anti-corruption policies.

Thus, the way in which corruption is discussed at the local and transnational level erases whiteness and colonialism and preserves global structures of white supremacy. As Ranganathan and Doshi (2017) argue, what reinforces whiteness will always be perceived as morally superior to what challenges it; this is the perverse morality of whiteness in our times.

For Ranganathan and Doshi (2017), talk of corruption helps legitimate authoritarianism and is often the deciding factor for who gets to decry and be absolved of corruption. There are several examples of how corruption has become a key tool of authoritarians and conservatives. Drybread's (2018) discussion of Brazil provides a useful example of how whiteness has played a fundamental role concerning whether politicians and 'individuals in the private sector' are labeled as corrupt. Drybread (2018) shows that race and gender played a key role in accusation of corruption made against Luis Inácio Lula and Dilma Rousseff, while Bolsonaro's deviant and criminogenic behavior has largely remained unaddressed by the criminal justice system. Such corruption can be opportunistic and win elections by stoking popular discontent (Ranganathan & Doshi, 2017).

Under such global understanding of corruption, Trump's anti-corruption narratives possess a semantic force rarely witnessed in any American political speech made in recent memory. Ranganathan and Doshi (2017) propose that in the current political conjuncture, fixing corruption and the 'establishment' is an affective subtext concerned with asserting whiteness and its imagined corollary, 'Americanness' – reaffirming whiteness in subtle and not so subtle ways. As Casey and Jaffee (2020) show, one cannot currently make sense of whiteness and corruption in the US, or across the globe, without an engagement with what Trump has said, done, and what he stands for in the context of entrenched white supremacy.

Much research on former president Trump has focused on the 'populist' character of his message, without further interrogating what makes white nationalist sentiment popular enough to mobilize supporters (Casey & Jaffee, 2020). Further research from critical whiteness studies on the impact of Trump and his supporters on the broader phenomenon of whiteness would be valuable (Casey & Jaffee, 2020). While there are several analyses of Trump's white supremacist agenda and its impact (see Bonds & Inwood, 2021; Donnor, 2020; Inwood, 2021; Kelly, 2020), the connection with corruption remains undertheorized.

This article theorizes how whiteness and coloniality are at the center of Trump's anti-corruption discourses about PR. Thus, I aim to shed light on one of the multiple dimensions in which corruption, colonialism, and whiteness operated within Trump's public rhetoric. The public performance of anti-corruption deployed by Trump is embedded in

long-standing colonial and racialized discourses of corruption. These narratives reproduce racial hierarchies and a particular logic of white supremacy as the antithesis of the corrupt other. As I show below, Trump made PR a particular example of colonial and racialized corrupt subjects, and therefore employed a colonial anti-corruption narrative.

The Puerto Rican multilayered crisis in sociolegal context

Puerto Rico is a Caribbean archipelago consisting of the Isla Grande, the island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra, and a series of smaller islands. As a result of the Spanish–American War, the US invaded PR in 1898, and after the signing of the Treaty of Paris⁶ between Spain and the US, PR was transferred to the US. Later, PR became a domain of the US Congress under the Territorial Clause of the US Constitution.⁷ In 1900, the US Congress legislated the Foraker Act,⁸ which established a civil government in PR and granted Puerto Ricans limited representation in the local government. In 1917, the Jones Act⁹ was passed, granting US citizenship to Puerto Ricans.

Simultaneously, between 1899 to 1922, in a series of cases known as the *Insular Cases*, the US Supreme Court ruled what would become the legal definition of PR and the US legal and political relationship with its territories (Atilés, 2020; Rivera Ramos, 2001). Concomitant with the legal and political practices of other western empires, the US used the corruption and economic backwardness of PR as justification for the legal accommodation developed in the *Insular Cases*. The opinions of the Court in the *Insular Cases* are embedded in racist and gendered descriptions of Puerto Ricans as unable to rule themselves given their inherent corruption (Rivera Ramos, 2001). This, I argue, constitutes an early manifestation of the coloniality of anti-corruption, in which self-rule was denied by the US government based on racialized understandings that saw PR culture and society as corrupt by nature.

The Americanization of PR, meant, among other things, the imposition of the US legal-political system, which was to move PR from its backwardness to western/American ways. Go (2000) has shown that education and transfer of political knowledge typically associated with Americanization were seen as the alternative to dealing with the inherently corrupt nature of Puerto Ricans. Those processes of transformation and ‘education’ of Puerto Ricans did not end with the elimination of the Spanish legal-political system during the first decades of the 20th century (a system considered corrupt by the US government), but the US has experimented with various technologies of subjectivation and anti-corruption policies throughout the colonial history. The ongoing colonial practices mean that an anti-corruption narrative and policies are constantly being rearticulated to justify US intervention in PR. As Villanueva (2019, p. 190) points out, ‘corruption discourses served to justify the US government’s denial of Puerto Ricans’ right to self-rule. As a result, the “corrupted” colonial subjects were forced to endure an intense policing regime to correct their behavior.’ Likewise, when analyzing the legal and political development of US colonialism in PR, it can be seen how corruption has served a double function: (1) corruption has been the narrative that legitimized US colonialism in PR, and (2) US capitalism has routinely pushed for instrumental anti-corruption measures and exceptional practices to ensure wealth extraction and profit-making while functionally pathologizing local leaders as untrustworthy, deviant, or otherwise ‘corrupt.’

While the discussion of the historical constitution of Puerto Ricans as corrupt subjects is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to recognize that Trump's public rhetoric is not new, nor unique in the 124 years of US colonialism in PR.

The colonial status of PR took a new turn in 1952 with the creation of the Commonwealth of PR, which allowed Puerto Ricans to draft their own constitution. This law, however, did not imply a substantial change in the US-PR political relationship; a telling example is that almost all the areas related to trade, money, international agreements, immigration, and tariffs are still under US control. Economic stagnation in the 1980s culminated in a transition of PR's economic and political-legal systems. This transition materialized in the 1990s with the transformation of PR's economy into a predominantly postindustrial one based on consumption, tourism, and speculative finances. PR has experienced economic hardship since 2006, resulting from the US Congress's decision, in 1996, to eliminate the tax exemption known as Section 936 of the US Internal Revenue Code (1976);¹⁰ a high level of public indebtedness; and the global economic crisis of 2008. As a result, Puerto Ricans have endured two decades of budgetary cuts, privatization and externalization of public services, low corporate taxation, and high dependence on bonds and debt issuance. These measures led to the bankruptcy of the PR government in 2016, when the public debt amounted to \$72 billion.

After the default in 2016, US Congress passed Public Law No. 114-118, known as the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). PROMESA is the US's solution to PR's crisis, and it is accompanied by the imposition of a Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB). Largely justified under the pretext of public corruption in the PR government, PROMESA and the FOMB have been the US government's solutions for ensuring the survival of the capitalist financial system, guaranteeing the payment of the public debt, and bringing PR back into financial and stock markets.

Against this background, in September 2017 Hurricanes Irma and María wreaked destruction on the archipelago in September 2017, leaving behind as much as \$94 billion of damage. Then, on January 7, 2020, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck the southern region of PR. The earthquake caused the displacement of 6,400 residents, over 8,300 damaged houses, and an estimated \$3.1 billion of damage.

As a result, when the COVID-19 global pandemic arrived in March 2020, PR was in a more precarious position than any other state or territory of the US. PR faced a \$9.7 billion direct economic impact, the loss of approximately \$2 billion in tax revenue,¹¹ the permanent loss of over 100,000 jobs,¹² and the loss of over 4,200 lives as result of the pandemic. Additionally, since the 1990s PR has been experiencing a public health crisis driven by limited resources allocated for preventive health care and primary care privatization. Finally, in September 2022, five years after Hurricane María, Hurricane Fiona landed in PR leaving behind a severely damaged electricity grid, and millions of dollars of damage.

It is precisely in this context of economic decline, social vulnerability, and multilayered crisis that the analysis of coloniality of anti-corruption becomes relevant. As will be shown, local communities have had to face a multiplicity of crises and disasters for which they lack any social protection or support from the US or PR governments.

The Puerto Rican experiences with corruption and anti-corruption laws and policies have received limited attention within sociolegal and sociological scholarship, despite PR's experiences with high-profile cases of corruption. Conversely, corruption has been largely covered by independent journalists, local NGOs, and by some political science and public administration scholars (Bobonis et al., 2016; Pérez-Chiqués & Rubin, 2022). Thus, this article constitutes a first attempt to map how coloniality of anti-corruption has operated in PR, and its sociological and legal implications in the wake of Hurricane María and the earthquakes.

Coloniality of anti-corruption and corruption narratives in Puerto Rico

The US government has historically used corruption as a means for colonial subjectification in PR. Corruption and backwardness were constantly brought up by members of the US Congress, the Supreme Court, and among the American legal academia in public debates on annexing PR to the US or not (Rivera Ramos, 2001). This is exemplified by former president Trump's tweets about PR politicians, as well as by the restrictions imposed on federal disaster relief funds in the aftermath of Hurricane María and the series of earthquakes beginning in January 2020. For example, Trump tweeted on August 28, 2019 (9:45 am EDT):

Puerto Rico is one of the most corrupt places on earth. Their political system is broken and their politicians are either Incompetent or Corrupt. Congress approved Billions of Dollars last time, more than any place else have ever gotten, and it is sent to Crooked Pols. No good! . . .

This tweet, which was posted while PR was preparing for the possible impact of Hurricane Dorian, caused countless political figures to react indignantly against the president (especially for falsely claiming that PR had received \$91 million in recovery funds).¹³ Likewise, after the series of earthquakes of January 2020, Trump's administration declined to send disaster relief funds to PR given the 'corruption of its politicians' (Sommerfeldt, 2020). Trump retweeted on January 21, 2020, at 8:12 pm EDT: '@realDonaldTrump repeatedly warned against incompetent & corrupt politicians in Puerto Rico managing disaster aid.'

Between September 19, 2017, and January 22, 2020, Trump posted 52 tweets directly mentioning PR. Many described PR and its politicians as corrupt, crooked, and incompetent. These tweets show the constitutive process of coloniality of anti-corruption. That is, these tweets demonstrate a process of subjectification of Puerto Ricans in the US colonial and white supremacist imagination. These tweets can be divided into three categories: (1) those that portray Puerto Rican politicians as corrupt and crooked; (2) those that emphasize the federal relief funds after Hurricane María and how Puerto Ricans are taking advantage of the US; and (3) those that portray Trump as 'the best thing that happened to PR.' By focusing on these tweets, I am not interested in fact-checking Trump, but rather reflecting on the constitutive process of an anti-corruption narrative. That is, how Trump's white supremacist and colonial discourse about corruption in PR is embedded in a particular history of colonial discourses about PR that have justified public and legal intervention with the archipelago and its politicians.

Consider those tweets that described Puerto Rican politicians as corrupt. For example, on September 14, 2018, at 5:23 pm EDT, Trump tweeted:

The story of Puerto Rico is the rebuilding that has occurred. The President has done an extraordinary job of cleanup, rebuilding electrical stuff and everything else. "*The people of Puerto Rico have one of the most corrupt governments in our country.*" (Emphasis added)

Similarly, President Trump tweeted on October 23, 2018, at 8:24 am EDT:

The people of Puerto Rico are wonderful but the inept politicians are trying to use the massive and ridiculously high amounts of hurricane/disaster funding to pay off other obligations. The U.S. will NOT bail out long outstanding & unpaid obligations with hurricane relief money!

These tweets present a double imaginary. First, Puerto Ricans are represented as undeserving victims of corrupt politicians that are going to (mis)use the federal disaster relief funds for the payment of the debt. Debt that is further described as the result of the mismanagement and corruption of colonial politicians, and in which the role of the US government and Wall Street is neglected to be described. This narrative is embedded in a colonial-patriarchal rationality that infantilizes colonial subjects, portraying them as incapable of self-rule and administering their own economy. This narrative reifies colonial and white supremacist understandings of corruption, which simultaneously dehumanize racialized and gendered communities and justify interventions as a form of protecting colonized people from the evils of corrupt politicians.

Moreover, this narrative is particularly salient when Trump disputed the number of casualties and deaths resulting from Hurricane María. Originally, the PR government reported 64 casualties¹⁴ as a result of the hurricane, then a report by Kishore et al. (2018) found that over 4,645 had died in the aftermath of Hurricane María. Finally, the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health published a report identifying 2,975 excess deaths in PR due to Hurricane María between September 2017 and February 2018.¹⁵ Trump took issue with these different reported numbers and argued that they were part of an intent to discredit him and his administration from doing a 'great job with the almost impossible situation in PR. Outside of the Fake News or politically motivated ingrates. . .' (October 1, 2017, 8:22:14 am EDT)

In what follows, I highlight Trump's tweets concerning the excess deaths in PR as they further evidence his strategy of undermining Puerto Ricans. As Trump states:

3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico. When I left the Island, AFTER the storm had hit, they had anywhere from 6 to 18 deaths. As time went by it did not go up by much. Then, a long time later, they started to report really large numbers, like 3000. . . (September 13, 2018, 8:37:27 am EDT)

. . . *This was done by the Democrats in order to make me look as bad as possible when I was successfully raising Billions of Dollars to help rebuild Puerto Rico. If a person died for any reason, like old age, just add them onto the list. Bad politics. I love Puerto Rico!* (September 13, 2018, 8:49:12 am EDT; emphasis added)

They say all these people died in the storm in Puerto Rico, yet 70% of the power was out before the storm. *So when did people start dying?* At what point do you recognize that what they are doing is a political agenda couched in the nice language of journalism? (September 14, 2018, 6:35:00 pm EDT; emphasis added)

. . . GWU Research to tell them how many people had died in Puerto Rico (how would they not know this?). This method was never done with previous hurricanes because other jurisdictions know how many people were killed. FIFTY TIMES LAST ORIGINAL NUMBER - NO WAY! (September 14, 2018, 10:23:26 pm EDT)

In this thread alone, one can identify just how the colonial subjects become, as Pulido et al. (2019) suggest, mere pawns in Trump's political machinations. These tweets show how racialized and colonized bodies do not count as real victims, but rather their deaths are just part of a corrupt plan implemented by Puerto Rican and Democratic politicians as an attempt to discredit Trump's benevolence to PR. As Trump putted away at his golf course on August 28, 2019, he stated, 'And by the way, I'm the best thing that's ever happened to Puerto Rico!' (August 28, 2019, 10:45:28 am EDT). This logic, in which the pain, suffering, and death of racialized bodies only count insofar as it helps manufacture a moral narrative of a benevolent leader, is deeply embedded in coloniality and whiteness. That is, racialized bodies and colonial subjects are always-already dead in the colonial imagination. This does not only apply to the Trump administration, but Ricardo Rosselló's administration also deployed a series of insensitive, racialized, and colonial discourses¹⁶ similar to Trump's discourses (see next section). This constitutes a paradigmatic moment in how coloniality of anti-corruption is reproduced at both the US national and local level.

Second, Trump constructed himself and his government as providers occupying a moral high ground.¹⁷ This imaginary assembled a neoliberal moral economy of colonialism. The logic behind this narrative is to deny Puerto Rican politicians from administering the resources provided by the federal government. Thus, the private sector and the federal government become the only reliable institutions to properly guarantee the uses of these funds. Tied to this rationale were Trump's tweets against Puerto Rican politicians posted between April and June 2019. In four key tweets posted between April 1 and 2 of 2019, Trump wrote:

The Democrats today killed a Bill that would have provided great relief to Farmers and yet more money to Puerto Rico despite the fact that Puerto Rico has already been scheduled to receive more hurricane relief funding than any "place" in history. The people of *Puerto Rico*. . . (April 1, 2019, 7:50 pm EDT)

. . . *are GREAT, but the politicians are incompetent or corrupt*. Puerto Rico got far more money than Texas & Florida combined, yet their government can't do anything right, the *place is a mess - nothing works*. FEMA & the Military worked emergency miracles, but politicians like. . . (April 1, 2019, 8:11 pm EDT; emphasis added)

. . . The best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico is President Donald J. Trump. So many wonderful people, *but with such bad Island leadership and with so much money wasted*. Cannot

continue to hurt our Farmers and States with these massive payments, and so little appreciation! (April 2, 2019, 4:45 am EDT; emphasis added)

Puerto Rico got 91 Billion Dollars for the hurricane, more money than has ever been gotten for a hurricane before & all their local politicians do is complain & ask for more money. The pols are grossly incompetent, spend the money foolishly or corruptly & only take from USA. . . (April 2, 2019, 7:33 am EDT)

In the above tweets Trump adds a new device to his narrative, in this case it is the tension between deserving Farmers (who are imagined within racialized and gendered categories as White-Christian-Men) and States (e.g., Republican states of Texas and Florida) and undeserving colonial subjects (imagined as racialized and gendered others). In this narrative, the deserving 'real citizens' are taken advantage of by those corrupt colonial subjects abusing US generosity. This narrative openly reinforces white nationalist discourses of the 'forgotten and abandoned' that Trump strategically articulated in his 2016 and 2020 campaigns. As Pulido et al. (2019, p. 522) argue, 'Trump employs racial fix by blaming racial others and immigrants to offer the white nation a psychological wage.' This wage does not merely validate white people's superiority, rather it addresses their emotional dislocation, fear, and resentment of a changing world affirming their status as the true nation. Bond and Inwood (2021) helpfully point out, this illuminates how whiteness is always and everywhere under siege, justifying both state and extra-legal forms of violence to sustain hierarchies of difference and institutionalized systems of white supremacy.

Corruption is also portrayed through a geographical imagination of inoperability and fraud. These geographies of fraud as the tweets demonstrate enable waste, messiness, and chaos. For example, Trump tweeted on August 27, 2019, 12:09 pm EDT: 'Wow! Yet another big storm heading to Puerto Rico. Will it ever end? Congress approved 92 Billion Dollars for Puerto Rico last year, an all-time record of its kind for anywhere.' Hence, PR, as a geography of fraud, represents a threat to the moral economy of normative white farmers. The presidential narrative presupposes a continuation of colonial discourses of corruption discussed earlier, and the inclusion of Puerto Ricans in the racialized universe of threatening minorities.

Yet, in the summer of 2019 Trump incorporated an additional device to his public narrative. In the following tweets, Trump suggests that former governor Ricardo Rosselló is under siege (which refers to the demonstrations carried in summer 2019 [see Atilas, 2022]), and Carmen Yulin, Mayor of San Juan, PR, becomes the embodiment of the corrupt politician.

A lot of bad things are happening in Puerto Rico. The Governor is under siege, the Mayor of San Juan is a despicable and incompetent person who I wouldn't trust under any circumstance, and the United States Congress foolishly gave 92 Billion Dollars for hurricane relief, much. . . (July 18, 2019, 7:54 am, EDT; emphasis added)

. . .of which was squandered away or wasted, never to be seen again. This is more than twice the amount given to Texas & Florida combined. I know the people of Puerto Rico well, and they are great. *But much of their leadership is corrupt & robbing the U.S. Government blind!* (July 18, 2019, 7:54 am EDT; emphasis added)

If the Puerto Rican leadership is corrupt and robbing the US government blind, it is clear that: . . . And by the way, I'm the best thing that's ever happened to Puerto Rico! (August 28, 2019, 7:45 am EDT)

It is important to note how Trump uses gendered and misogynic language to describe Carmen Yulin, Mayor of San Juan. These narratives are very similar to those used against Hillary Clinton in his 2016 presidential campaign. In the Trumpian imaginary, women in position of power become corrupt, crooks, or despicable.

Trump assembled a public narrative that placed himself and his administration not only as the victims of corrupt colonial, racialized, and gendered politicians, but as the benevolent leaders that, despite the fraudulent behavior of the colonial subjects, continue to provide and guarantee citizens their social welfare. Interestingly, this colonial narrative does not resort to legality or to discourses of the lack of rule of law as the reason for Puerto Rican corruption. Corruption in this narrative is not the result of specific illegalities, but is based on a geography of fraud, messiness, and undeserving racialized subjects taking advantage of hard-working white Americans. Similarly, in this narrative, there is no private sector, capital, or history. Corruption, though, is one of the forms in which the colonial being manifests in this case.

US colonial anti-corruption policies after Hurricane María

The spectacular racism of Trump's administration has obscured the detrimental anti-corruption policies implemented by his administration in PR. These anti-corruption narratives are useful for framing my approach toward the logic of disaster aid evaluation and the ways distribution excludes, disciplines, and discriminates against marginalized populations. Firstly, PROMESA and the FOMB were legislated in 2016 under the guise that PR required technical and nonpartisan solutions for addressing the 14 years-long economic and fiscal crisis. The main rationale for this legislation was that the PR government and its politicians had been historically engaged in unscrupulous spending, debt issuance, and overall practices of corruption. Therefore, an external, apolitical, expert-led FOMB was imposed to deal with the systemic corruption that precipitated PR into its economic and financial crisis.

However, the nomination of the members of the FOMB prove to be quite the opposite. For example, Trump appointed Justin M. Peterson, who, as a managing partner of DCI Group, had actively lobbied to oppose comprehensive bankruptcy protections and served as an advisor to hedge funds and bondholders known for having pushed for exorbitant debt payments (Hedge Clippers, 2021). This list includes Antonio Medina, former executive of Merck and executive director of the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (Hedge Clippers, 2021); and John Nixon, an accountant who actively participated in the austerity measures that led to the Flint water crisis (Hedge Clippers, 2021). These appointments, as Dennis (2020) has pointed out, raise ethical and accountability concerns, and illustrate the revolving doors between private and public services.

Secondly, the case of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the US government restrictions and limitations to PR regarding access to recovery funds further reveal the coloniality of anti-corruption. FEMA insisted on imposing

preconditions, such as the creation of accountability structures and transparency measures that guarantee the proper use of funds. It was due to this pressure that former governor Ricardo Rosselló's administration created the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3).¹⁸ This newly created office was mandated under the guise of transparency and anti-corruption and was placed under the umbrella of the recently created Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Agency.¹⁹ Although it is true that Rosselló's and former governor Wanda Vázquez's administrations have been under investigation for possible mismanagement of public funds,²⁰ behind these restrictions and requirements lie racialized and colonial understandings of corruption. This is exemplified by the fact that these restrictions and preconditions were not required of the Government of Texas in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.²¹

The denial of funds came from more than just the presidency, but also from other agencies of the executive branch. For example, Sommerfeldt (2020) reported that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was initially supposed to distribute \$9.7 billion in aid to PR in September 2019 to help address the devastation caused by Hurricane María. However, on January 12, 2020, HUD released only about \$1.5 billion of those funds, of which PR only used \$5.8 million. President Trump and HUD cited corruption and financial mismanagement as the reason for refusing to distribute the aid fund.

Later that week, after numerous Puerto Rican diasporic groups and Congress members pressured the Republican administration to release the funds, President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for PR, of an additional \$8.2 billion in disaster mitigation. Nevertheless, the release of aid relief came with a new layer of federal supervision and anti-corruption measures.²²

For example, FEMA appointed Alexis Amparo as the Federal Coordinating Officer for federal recovery operations in the affected areas, and HUD appointed Robert M. Couch as the Federal Financial Monitor to oversee the grant administration and disbursement process of disaster recovery funds.²³ Likewise, the local government and the COR3 created a Transparency Portal that accounts for all the funds that are distributed in PR.²⁴ These multiple layers of supervision have proven inefficient, since they focus on petty corruption while ignoring the corruption of the powerful. Similarly, these so-called anti-corruption measures, and the imposition of federal supervision, have undermined PR's preparedness to address other potential future disasters, as Hurricane Fiona illustrated. This is exemplified by the HUD's Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery Program funds not being distributed since Hurricane María (Torres-Cordero, 2020), which in turn shows that coloniality of anti-corruption exacerbated populations' vulnerability and manufactured new conditions for disasters.

The fraud prevention and anti-corruption narrative upholds neoliberal disaster governance, informs state incredulity around ownership claims, and disciplines state-survivor interactions. The importance of this cannot be understated since disaster fraud prevention is a significant (and well-funded) concern of the federal government (Molinari, 2022). Nevertheless, what the Puerto Rican experience shows is that these disaster fraud preventions often operate along racial and gendered lines.

Furthermore, Trump was reticent to sign the PR Earthquake Supplemental legislation (Bill H.R. 5687), which would have provided an additional \$4.7 billion for a broad range

of disaster recovery and reconstruction activities, as well as providing additional tax exemptions (Sierra, 2020). Trump's veto threat was based on the misleading argument that there was enough money in PR's disaster pipeline. Sierra (2020) argues that this claim is misleading for two reasons: the federal government had not released the bulk of the recovery-and-reconstruction funds almost three years after Hurricane María; and the \$45 billion was authorized to be spent on hurricane-related activities, not earthquakes.

All these objections and limitations to the recovery funds illustrated the double movement of Trump's anti-corruption narratives. On the one hand, Trump's spectacular racism generates the condition for undermining and dehumanizing Puerto Ricans; and, on the other hand, this creates the conditions for detrimental policies that in turn impeded the recovery in the wake of the disasters. Thus, the coloniality of anti-corruption is exemplified in PR in two fundamental ways: (1) the colonial history of PR, and the political constitution of Puerto Ricans as corrupt-colonial subjects; the description of colonial and racialized subjects as corrupt is not limited to the US, but also takes place at the local level, when the ruling classes (or local politicians) define dispossessed Puerto Ricans as corrupt; (2) the imposition of PROMESA and the FOMB to 'tackle' the economic crisis, and the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and María. The latter was marked by numerous scandals of corruption involving FEMA, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and federal and local governments.

Conclusion

As Maldonado (2019, p. 337) stated, 'the story of Puerto Rico cannot be told without reference to Western modern catastrophe and coloniality.' Hurricane María was a catastrophic event that, among other things, exposed the vulgarity of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the US. 'Listening to Donald Trump's inaccurate comparisons between Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane María or his complaints that Puerto Rico was throwing the US budget "out of whack" and watching him throw paper towels to Puerto Ricans in need could not but recall Cornel West's warning that a Trump presidency would be a "neofascist catastrophe"' (Maldonado, 2019, p. 337). This catastrophe, and the uses of anti-corruption narratives must be understood as central features of coloniality of anti-corruption.

The US government and Trump administration's anti-corruption interventions in PR, as well as the description of Puerto Ricans as corrupt subjects, have directly undermined PR's capacity to respond to natural disasters. More importantly, these descriptions portray an important connection between narratives of corruption, whiteness, and colonialism, which I have named 'coloniality of anti-corruption.' This article has shown that corruption is an essential part of colonial and racialized power structure and policies in PR.

This entails a significant contribution to the development of the emerging global south and critical sociology of corruption. What the concept of coloniality of anti-corruption demonstrates is that anti-corruption narratives and reforms are largely embedded in western or global north imperialism. Thus, the analysis conducted in this article of Trump's narrative of corruption in PR, I argue, can be replicated, in other global south, colonized and racialized communities. The epistemic and policy development of an anti-corruption industry manufactured the language and narrative about global south

countries and their inherent corruption, which was then articulated by the Trump administration in PR. Similarly, by centering the experiences of those who faced the effects of anti-corruption policies, this article has aimed to underscore the impact that homogeneous, Eurocentric, and global north anti-corruption policies have in communities of color and global south countries.

Trump's tweets about Puerto Rican politicians are historically and sociopolitically embedded in the US imperial project and in the contemporary populist narrative of white supremacy. Colonial discourses on the corrupt nature of Puerto Ricans remain part of the fabric of US colonial history and of its sociopolitical practices in PR. Trump's spectacular racism simultaneously demonstrates the long history of colonialism in PR, and obscures the detrimental policies imposed by the colonial state in the wake of disasters. Anti-corruption, when used in colonial settings, becomes a technology used for maintaining unequal power relations, largely grounded in race, gender, and class.

Thus, the racialized and colonial interpretations of Puerto Ricans as corrupt, and PR as a geography of fraud, have justified, throughout US colonial history, limitations on PR's autonomy and a denial of self-determination for Puerto Ricans. Trump's tweets and the various anti-corruption policies imposed by his administration cannot be dissociated from the racialized interpretations used to legitimize US colonialism in PR. That is, the coloniality of anti-corruption.

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Notes

1. For an in-depth analysis of the US racialized-colonial history in PR see Godreau and Bonilla (2021) and Lloréns (2014).
2. Public Law 114-187 of 2016.
3. Barak (2022) has demonstrated how sociological criminology can engage in a systemic analysis of Donald Trump, his administration, and the impact of his deviant behavior on the general population. This article aims to underscore the colonial and racial implication of the criminogenic practices analyzed by Barak (2022).
4. See: <https://factba.se/trump/>
5. See: www.thetrumparchive.com
6. Treaty in which Spain transferred sovereignty over PR, Guam, and the Philippines to the US.
7. US Constitution Article IV-3, Clause 2.
8. Foraker Act of April 12, 1900 (cap. 191, 31 Stat.77).
9. Jones Act, ch. 190, 39 Sta. 951 § 2 (1917).
10. 26 U.S. Code § 936 – Puerto Rico and possession tax credit. This law came to an end on December 31, 2005.

11. See: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-14/covid-19-may-cost-puerto-rico-2-billion-in-taxes-board-says
12. See: www.estudiostecnicos.com/pdf/Update-COVID-3-ENG-May-18.pdf
13. See: www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-feuds-with-san-juan-mayor-as-tropical-storm-takes-direct-aim-at-puerto-rico/2019/08/28/6b5170e2-c990-11e9-be05-f76ac4ec618c_story.html/
14. See: www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-hurricane-maria-deaths-20180529-story.html
15. See: <https://publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/projects/PRstudy/Acertainment%20of%20the%20Estimated%20Excess%20Mortality%20from%20Hurricane%20Maria%20in%20Puerto%20Rico.pdf>
16. See: <https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2019/07/the-889-pages-of-the-telegram-chat-between-rossello-nevares-and-his-closest-aides/>
17. As I have shown throughout this article, corruption discourses are typically instrumental and self-serving. In this sense, both the Trump administration and international organizations develop comparative global metrics of corruption often designed in a way that favors global north countries and further pathologizes global south countries.
18. See: P.R. Exec. Order No. 2017-065 (Oct. 23, 2017) (creating ‘Central Recovery and Reconstruction Office of Puerto Rico’); see also P.R. Exec. Order No. 2017-069 (Nov. 10, 2017). Two of the main arguments to create this new office were: (1) to organize the recovery efforts under one agency; and (2) to guarantee transparency on the spending of federal funds, especially after the numerous cases of corruption or mismanagement of public funds in the aftermath of Hurricane María.
19. See: 2009 P.R. Laws 29 (establishing the Public Private Partnership Authority).
20. See: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/federal-watchdog-launches-investigation-potential-interference-distribution-millions/story?id=61957794/>
21. For a comparative analysis of the disaster response in PR, Florida, and Texas see, Willison et al. (2022).
22. See: www.politico.com/news/2020/01/15/trump-to-lift-hold-on-82b-in-puerto-rico-disaster-aid-099139
23. See: www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_20_008
24. See: <https://recovery.pr/es>

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