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The Life of the Other: An Analysis of Puerto Rico within the United Nations
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Abstract

During my experience at the United Nations, I found a significant issue in the breakup of the United Nations and the way that the U.N functions. I discovered that there were certain groups of people were neglected from the discussions and decision-making processes. Also, I noticed that while they were 193 member states many were responsible for representing other smaller countries or specific groups of people. The problem that was exposed to me, however, was their neglect in doing so. In noticing this, I felt I was a witness to the experience of the other, a philosophical term used by Judith Butler. In my paper, I use the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico within the U.N and its relation to the experience of the life of the other. In doing so, I am using this example to represent the grander issue at the United Nations, which I believe bleeds out into the structure of our institutions. I became interested in this topic because of my Puerto Rican heritage and my family in Puerto Rico underwent several setbacks because of the two 2017 hurricanes. Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria devastated the people of Puerto Rico, and yet, the United Nations made little to no efforts in helping the Puerto Rican communities.

The history of the colonization of Puerto Rico, as well as the current status of Puerto Rico amidst the two hurricanes, is essential to consider when discussing the current issue at the United Nations. In writing my paper, I use several journals, articles, and books to analyze these said issues critically. My method in this paper is to base my conversation around the philosopher Judith Butler's theorization of what she calls the other while also discussing other vital concepts such as grievability and interdependency. I end my project with a discussion of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative where I will provide my resolution to this issue. These methods are conventional in the field of philosophy.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology	6
The Other	8
The State of Nature-Creation of Institutions	13
Puerto Rico as a Colonized Country	17
Hurricane Irma & Maria	20
Puerto Rico in the United Nations	24
Statements from Petitioners	25
Findings & Recommendations	32
Conclusion & Discussion	36

Introduction

In March 2018, I had the pleasure in taking part in the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women in the United Nations for one of my courses at Pace University, Gender and Human Rights: An Introduction to Transnational Feminist Activism. The Commission on the Status of Women serves as the “principal global policy-making body” dedicated to women’s rights and gender equality. Annually, commission members gather to debate critical issues of concern and draft recommendations for United Nations member states to address gender equality issues in their respective countries. The priority theme of the conference I attended was: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. During these two weeks, thousands of international activists, civil society leaders, and Non-Governmental Organization representatives lobbied the Commission to ensure their voices and perspectives were included in the outcome documents.

As an advocate for women rights and a participant in the Commission on the Status of Women, I was in the United Nations for over sixty hours gathering information on current statuses of various countries in said issues, existing policies, resolutions offered by nation states, and criticisms of other countries absent during the Commission on the Status of Women.

Short of a year later, I returned to the United Nations but this time to attend First Committee for another course, Global Politics of Disarmament and Arms Control. First committee is responsible for examining the international politics of limiting the impact of violent conflict through disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation. I analyzed and critiqued diplomatic, legal, military and humanitarian efforts on weapons of mass destruction (such as nuclear, biological and chemical), conventional weapons (such as landmines, cluster munitions,

small arms and light weapons), the arms trade, as well as emerging high-tech systems (such as cyber- weapons and military robots) and improvised weapons.

My experiences at the United Nations stimulated the topic for my Thesis. When I attended the Commission on the Status of Women and First Committee I was exposed to a significant issue at the United Nations; an issue that I believe bleeds out into different political and ethical sectors apart from the United Nations. I noticed that many countries and different groups of people had been wholly neglected out of the conversations and decision-making processes. This was a result of certain countries not being recognized as an individual nation-state or their representatives disregarded to bring them into the conversation. I found that this was immoral and that there is a vital need for this situation to be addressed. For my project, I decided to bring light to this issue and to offer a solution.

Coming from a Puerto Rican heritage, I decided to use the example of Puerto Rico's connection to the United Nations as my focal point in this paper and as a case study to represent a more general issue: the lack of representation and sovereignty amongst countries in the United Nations. Because Puerto Rico is acknowledged as a commonwealth country with the United States, they are expected to be represented by the United States. However, in both of my experiences at the United Nations, Puerto Rico and their issues were completely invisible despite their recent hardships with the two 2017 hurricanes that devastated the island. Ironically the core of the United States Constitution is the affirmation of self-sovereignty. We have the right to govern ourselves. However, Puerto Rico is denied just that.

I believe that the neglect of Puerto Rico within the United Nations exemplifies a more significant issue. When we are in the confines of the United Nations, delegates and leaders from

all over the world come together to discuss the problems they face alone with one another as well come up with resolutions to address those issues. By neglecting smaller countries or different groups of people, we are depriving people of their rights and are acting immorally. We are treating them as what philosopher Judith Butler defines as “the other.” By limiting who gets to speak, we create a barrier between a group of people and us.

The people of Puerto Rico are not alone in this issue. Women, children, the disabled, and indigenous people are also facing this lack of attention. Thus, the decisions made at the United Nations are failing to reflect a universal standard and needs to be resolved. This particular issue incites multiple philosophical questions. How are we to define the other? How are our institutions set up in treating the other? Is there an ethical obligation to treat the other in a certain way? If so, then how?

This paper will be mostly concentrating on the history of Puerto Rico in its connection to the United States, the current state of Puerto Rico amidst the devastating 2017 hurricanes, the aspects of colonialism that explains why the system is the way it is now, as well as understanding how eurocentrism plays a role in political representation and because of this there needs to be an ideological shift that promotes representation for all people especially the other.

Methodology

For this project, I will begin by discussing what the other is. I will then analyze our current social institutions that will lead me in addressing the current situation in Puerto Rico. I will focus on several aspects of my discussion of Puerto Rico. First, the state of Puerto Rico as a colonized country, and then the state of the island amidst the two devastating hurricanes in 2017—Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. I will conduct a textual analysis of several pieces of

writing, through the lens of philosopher Judith Butler, that demonstrate how the storms had an egregious effect on Puerto Rico.

After the two devastating storms, it soon became apparent that the island lacked the proper support they needed from the United States. Puerto Rico is not a declared nation-state in the United Nations, because they are commonwealth with the United States. It is expected that the U.S representative discloses the specific issues Puerto Rico endures and speak on behalf of their interests. Amidst the two storms, however, it was clear that the voices of Puerto Rico were left unheard. They were not ethically represented and were unable to self-sovereign.

In 2018, multiple Puerto Rican advocates from different advocacy groups and international allies soon began to petition in the United Nations to shed light on their situation and to denounce the colonial occupation of the territory by the United States. As this relevant issue came to light, moral questions emerged. What kind of responsibility does the United States have with making sure Puerto Rico is heard in the United Nations? What is the most ethical structure we can have as a society in regards to political representation and self-determination? In my paper, as I answer these questions, I evaluate the historical and current status of Puerto Rico in the United Nations, and I offer a rational solution to this issue.

Puerto Rico will serve to represent the issue surrounding the philosophical notion of the other. I believe that the neglect of representation of Puerto Rico and their inability to self-determination in the United Nations is representative of the life of the other. The following questions I will spend my time in the paper answering are the following: whose lives count as worth living, what institutions are set in place to represent those people, and can we classify those systems as representing an ethical standard? In arriving at my conclusion, I will base my

conversation around the philosopher Judith Butler's theorization of what she calls the other while also discussing Thomas Hobbes' theory of the state of man, and will arrive at a discussion of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative where I will provide my recommendation.

The Other

The other is a phrase grandfathered by philosopher Judith Butler in her discussion of our relationships with, in fact, other people and when she evaluates current political systems. She begins a lecture at Yale University by asking the following questions: Whose lives count as living, what motivates us, what justifies actions of that kind, and the core of her lecture why preserve the life of the other? These particular questions, as Butler points out, has to be asked not only of individuals but of institutions, forms of government, and economic systems. In asking these questions, we can evaluate whether or not our institutions are acting ethically. (Why Preserve the Life of the Other).

In the context of this paper, whenever I discuss Butler and her use of the other, I am referring to the citizens of Puerto Rico. Whenever we typically discuss our actions and our relationships with one another we use common vernacular such as "I," "We," "You" and "they." In talking this way, this is an implicated expression of our bond to one another. We use these words to negotiate expression and to classify individuals. But what do these words entail in our relationships to one another? What does it mean to refer to Puerto Rico as they? How are they classified as others? Which lives do we consider preservable? Are the ones who ask these very questions the same for the lives whom the question is posed? These are the questions that Butler takes on in her lecture Why Preserve the Life of the Other and her book, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* These are the questions that I am concerned with exploring in this paper.

I believe it is somewhat intuitive to agree that in talking in the first person we already assume that there is an I and that our lives are meant to be preserved. As Rene Descartes affirmed because we are thinking beings we exist. (Newman). For Butler, however, an entity has to conform to certain conceptions and norms that constitute life in the social order, to be recognized as a being. To exist, for Butler, is to inherently be owed certain rights in the social realm and to have a social connection with others: “to be alive or, indeed, to be ‘attached’ to life would mean to be attached to one’s dissolution or, indeed, to discover that life is never exclusively one’s own” (Why Preserve the Life of the Other). For there to be an "I" there has to be a relation, particularly a link to a set of norms and others.

The clearest example of a right that is owed to beings is the right to life. Humans are entitled to protection against harm and destruction. To maintain social order and to ensure that people’s rights are kept we have structures of institutions to ground our lives. For example, we have a legal system that is supposed to reflect what is universally constituted as right or wrong. Our legal system is an example of a social institution that determines what we collectively agree is moral and immoral. The utmost crucial moral belief for an individual is to preserve life and to ensure that all human life is not at risk of being hurt, threatened, or killed. Legal systems and the government not only protect our rights but also connect us as beings. The existence of a life, Butler, affirms, is itself constituted through selective means; "as a result, we cannot refer to this "being" outside of the operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power, and through which life is produced" (Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable 1). To be recognized as a being one has to be mindful that they are a part of these institutions and systems together. One cannot be separate from social institutions. If one is a

living being then they are consequently bound to the systems we have in our society even if they disagree with it. For example, although an individual might disagree with the notion that every individual deserves a fair trial because of the presence of overwhelming corroborating evidence, a fair trial is a protected right for citizens. One cannot be a living being free from the constraints of law if they want to be a part of society. Butler understands that social institutions are necessary and most importantly are connected to the individuals of a civilization. Thus, our lives are then dependent on institutions such the American Legal System and the United Nations. We have the United Nations whose principle motto during the two conferences I attended was to ensure that no one was left behind. Another imperative aspect that Butler underscores in her discussion of social institutions is how because of them we are connected to each and every individual. Butler exclaims that:

“There is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment...” (Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable 19).

Butler gives us an approach to how we should be treating others. She recognizes that there is a need for institutions to protect our rights, or our conditions, of life. However, not only does she agree that institutions are necessary but she also believes that a system of interdependency is the only way to have ethical social institutions. Butler calls for a politics of interdependency-a sovereign that values individualism but also emphasizes how our lives are dependent on each

other. For Butler, it is important to understand that in order for there to be an “I” there is also a “we.” (Why Preserve the Life of the Other).

Butler underscored a term that is referred to as precarious lives. Precariousness is a term that means a life is endangered or insecure and implies an obligation imposed upon us. It also serves to mark a series of conditions that allow us to apprehend life. Precariousness is a system of dependency. Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It means exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. To say that a life is precarious requires not only that a life is apprehended as a life, but also that precariousness be an aspect of what is apprehended in what is living. Precariousness could be viewed similarly to a relationship of an infant that is dependent with its mother. Without the constant support of its mother, the infant is unable to survive and is subject to harm easily. There is a distinct obligation for the mother to take care of the child for it to grow and survive. Thus, we can see that precariousness is not something that is obtained throughout life but instead it is something that every person is born with. The life of the infant lies in the hands of others. Butler believes that this dynamic never ends. Every life is in the hands of others.

The way that we achieve a government of interdependency is by establishing a system where there is equal grievability. It is vital for Butler for us to understand that our lives are dependent on the *precarious other*. There is an apparent ethical obligation that arises in acknowledging that there exists an other and that we are connected. Central for Butler, therefore, is treating one another as a mother would her infant. Butler calls for a substantial form of equality, which safeguards all lives, and seeks to equalize what she calls grievability.

For Butler, a life is considered worthy if it is being grieved, it should be marked as a loss. If institutions were structured in radical equality that meant every life is worth preserving and every loss would be lamented then this would change how we think about political issues. In trying to produce equal grievability, we can fix the current situation in Puerto Rico.

Grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters. We are given this image from Butler to describe grievability: we imagine that an infant comes into the world, is sustained in and by that world through to adulthood and old age, and finally dies. We imagine that when the child is wanted, there is a massive celebration at the beginning of life. But there can be no celebration without an implicit understanding that the life at any moment can be lost, that life is grievable. The condition of there being a life is that it can at any moment end. (Why Preserve the Life of the Other). Grief then attends the life that has already been lived and presupposes that life as having ended. By grieving, the concept of responsibility comes into play. We must ask ourselves: Am I responsible for others and not only to myself? Subjects of social inequalities are lives that are measured in different values, lives that are refused to be lamented. Thus, by refusing to grieve a life one refuses to acknowledge it as a life entirely. Without grievability, there is a life that is not fully lived. Butler challenges us to recognize we have an obligation to the other, even if we do not know who they are. We need to be able to critique individualism and acknowledge the particularities of all communities because interdependency is a moral necessity. It is possible to have an ethical social institution insofar as ensure the system is accounting for every individual. Understanding Butler's ideologies of the precarious other, interdependency and equal grievability will help us understand the distressing political status of Puerto Rico.

Before I begin to delve into the historical and current political status of Puerto Rico, it is crucial to understand Hobbes concerning Butler's ideas regarding the precarious other because in doing so, we can understand where the social institutions are flawed and where they fail to grieve equally. Where Hobbes exposes that the nature of man is to be at odds with one another, Butler theories take a step forward and declares that there is a condition of what she calls interdependency for beings. In the next section of this paper, I will be discussing Hobbes' ideas regarding the state of nature of man, of which is somewhat paralleled to Butler's ontological ideas of the other, and how the statue of nature led to the creation of government, the utmost powerful institution we have. In doing so, we can see the issues that are apparent with Puerto Rico, in their position at the United Nations, concerning the United States.

The State of Nature-Creation of Institutions

The state of nature of beings is a philosophical ideology that denotes the hypothetical conditions of what the lives of people might have been like before the existence of social institutions. In philosophical discourse, there is no universal understanding of the state of nature for man. Typically, philosophers have argued that the state of nature is either in a state of war or in a state of peace. Society in my perspective is neither in a state of pure malice or in a state of peace. The state of nature for man is a state of flux. It is in a continuous change, and there is not a universal permanent ideology of the state of man. Individuals for me are neither born evil nor good but rather are shaped by the society and culture they live in. People are not atomically born with morality, but instead, they are taught it. When an individual is born, they are ultimately molded by their society. Then, they determine whether they live a life of evil or a life of goodness. The state of man then at that point can be separated into two forms: living in what

Thomas Hobbes referred to as a state of war or the Christian theological concept of the state of peace. However, we need institutions because presently, we can find many individuals who act in a Hobbesian state of war.

The idea that society is in a state of war is a concept originated from the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his book the *Leviathan*. Hobbes theory of the state of nature helps us understand the need for institutions such as the United Nations, geared towards providing universal accountability and resolutions to global issues. Hobbes while describing the state of nature of men characterizes individuals as intrinsically evil and mal-intentioned: “Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall” (Hobbes 84).

In a Hobbesian state, every person is opposed to one another, and they are only in the interests of themselves. It is a violent place and society where men are "nasty and brutish" (Hobbes 84), and they must be protected from the people themselves. This idea is irrespective to Christian theology where the state of nature for men is a state of peace and goodness. Hobbes engages in debunking false religious beliefs that before the law there was no sin and discusses how there was never a time where mankind was in a peaceful state. There is nothing that can be considered good. The only thing we can identify as good is our natural impulses. Our reason is the tool that enables man to achieve what they desire while avoiding aversions, Hobbes term to describe the evils of the world. Having described the dismays of the state of nature, in which fear reigns dominant, Hobbes recommends a series of laws which he identifies as the Laws of Nature that men must follow to reach peace and stray from a dissolute society. He describes that being a

member of society means that one agrees to what he calls a social contract, that includes all of the Laws of Nature, for there to be peace. (Hobbes 100-101).

To get at a state of peace there needs to be a civil state, and we need a social contract, the act of giving up certain natural rights and transferring them to someone else. This is on the condition that everyone else involved in making the contract also simultaneously gives up his or her rights. Because Hobbes believes that men are equal by nature, man will not give up his rights until he has the assurance that others will as well. For Hobbes, the government has the authority to control the rights of men. The power should not be shared amongst the citizens of the state and the sovereign. The head of state after a social contract is made must be all-powerful. Hobbes believed that the most effective form of government was an absolute monarchy. (Hobbes 95). Even if the absolute monarchy was executing their job ineffectively, the people had no right to oppose. With a Hobbesian state of nature, people had no contribution nor right to determine on their own what was just or unjust. It seems as if he believed that people were incapable of doing so because they are only in the interest of themselves. Ultimately, the creation of law is needed before individuals are obliged to follow it.

The first two laws are that natural man, to preserve life, must seek peace and follow it unless you are destroying yourself. From these first two laws of nature, Hobbes proceeds to deduce a series of other laws, each one building upon the last. The third law of nature states that it is not enough to make contracts, but that we are required to keep the contracts we make. Butler would say in doing this we would be trying to reflect the conscience of the being. This law of nature is the foundation for the concept of justice. He defines justice, "Justice, therefore, that is to say, Keeping of Covenant, is a rule of reason, by which we are forbidden to do anything

destructive to our life; and consequently a Law of Nature" (Hobbes 103). But because of the human desire for power, there is always an incentive to break the contract, despite the logic of the third law and the natural mandate to preserve our own lives. The law of nature ultimately is Hobbes own set of laws that he believes are needed in a government for society to function. People in society had to submit themselves to the power of the sovereign to reach that state of peace. A government and multiple social institutions are created so that morality is accounted for in our social norms and conditions.

Hobbes ideas are embedded in our current institutions. Similar to Hobbes state of nature many individuals in the United States today are in the interest of themselves and should be protected from dangerous innate desires. Even Sigmund Freud in his book, *The Future of an Illusion*, discusses that humans have natural desires for repulsive behavior such as murder, violence, rape, cannibalism and even incest: "One has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, tendencies, and that with a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behaviour in human society" (Freud 97). Thus, the United States and other countries in the world enacted laws and regulations on humans to protect them from these desires. It is evident that we in the United States have a social contract with our government. We have to repress a lot of our selfish desires to have the protection of the government. For example, even if we have the desire to murder someone we cannot because then we will lose our freedoms and be excluded from society: we will become incarcerated. By adhering to the laws imposed by the government, we are allowed to have freedom. However, the creation of these systems, especially Hobbes call for an absolute monarchy, establish a power dynamic and a dangerous hierarchy.

Again, if we relate Hobbes ideas today, we see that in society although people can democratically voice their concerns, they cannot directly and easily change the laws we have today. This is apparent in the situation in Puerto Rico. Despite there being so many groups speaking out and calling out for self-determination and representation at the United Nations, they specifically speak out against the United States, the institutions who have more power than Puerto Rico hold the tools for change. Hobbes recommendation, though well-intentioned, consequently gives too much power given to a particular group of people. We see this in the case of Puerto Rico in their history of being colonized by the United States.

Puerto Rico As a Colonized Country

From the year 1898 to 1917 Puerto Rico changed from being a Spanish colony to being an American colony as a result of the Spanish-American war. Puerto Rico had initially been colony to Spain for over four centuries before the United States entered the picture. In 1898, the United States invaded Puerto Rico due to its interests in developing a sugar market. During this time the Spanish Caribbean was in political turmoil because the war had crippled countries like Cuba and Puerto Rico had begun to advocate for changes in Spanish policy viciously. To

“quell the revolution in Cuba and retain the loyalty of its subjects in Puerto Rico, Spain enacted the Autonomous Charter, which granted both of its colonies significant autonomy over domestic affairs as well as the right to enter into international agreements.” (Caban 2).

Although the Autonomous Charter granted Puerto Rico with autonomy, the United States refused to acknowledge this charter and under the Treaty of Paris Puerto Rico lost citizenship for both Spain and never retained it for the United States. Puerto Ricans were also neglected out of the

decision-making processes made in the Treaty of Paris, but despite this they welcomed United States sovereignty in the hopes that they would be granted independence or incorporated as an equal member of the US union.

After centuries of Spanish colonial rule, the American generals issued a decree after colonizing Puerto Rico guaranteeing life, liberty, and happiness to the residents. As a result, there was unwavering support from the Puerto Ricans.. After the Americans won the war, the promises that the U.S promised were unfulfilled. Until May of 1900, U.S Army generals ruled over Puerto Rico, and they ultimately subverted various Puerto Rican institutions. They eliminated the political system set up by Spanish, imposed the US legal system onto Puerto Rico, they established the public educational system and obligated the school systems to incorporate English classes as part of their curriculum.

In 1901 the U.S Congress enacted the Foraker Act, which established a civilian administration to rule Puerto Rico. By passing this law, this gave more power to the US federal government and prevented Puerto Ricans to have a meaningful role in their government. The U.S first appointed the governor and the way they structured the political system the U.S had the most power. Puerto Rican officials were denied representation in Washington and all of the laws enacted by the Puerto Rican House of Delegates had to be approved and supported by the U.S Executive Council. Any law that was brought by Puerto Rico officials could quickly be annulled or vetoed by the U.S. This particular act ensured, that "Puerto Rico belongs to the United States, but it is not the United States, nor a part of the United States" (Fernandez 143).

The Foraker Act, also, provoked two main initiatives for the U.S in their colonization of Puerto Rico: one to diminish the Puerto Rican culture and to benefit from the profitable and

useful opportunities Puerto Rico had to offer. The U.S benefited tremendously from the sugar and tobacco resources that were available in Puerto Rico. Also, Puerto Rico was useful for military strategy. The U.S intended to create a navy outpost in Puerto Rico to guard the shipping exports. The citizens of Puerto Rico was being exploited and truly abused by the U.S system of government.

It wasn't until 1917, the eve of the U.S involvement of World War I, that Puerto Rico received legal standing with the United States. The Jones Act of 1917 established an updated system of colonial power. Puerto Rico was conferred as U.S citizens. Even as they were finally considered as U.S citizens, they are still unable to vote for the U.S President and unable to have representation in Congress. They were also declared incapable of governing themselves. Puerto Rico was not accepted as a state because a court judge declared that Puerto Rico was too racially inferior to be a part of the U.S legal system. The tension between the United States and Puerto Rico has dated back to the 1800s.

As a result of the colonization of Puerto Rico, during the 1800s, the country experienced severe economic downfalls. The exports of coffee and sugar, "lost their European and Caribbean markets, and the island was subjected to punitive U.S. tariffs" (Caban 1). In addition, their coffee industry was merely destroyed due to a hurricane in 1898 that killed three thousand people and caused harsh economic repercussions. The wealth from the capitalist class infrastructure curtailed due to military efforts. It was apparent that the U.S did intend to convert Puerto Ricans into "bicultural, bilingual, loyal subjects under the permanent colonial rule" (Caban 1). The colonialism of Puerto Rico demonstrates the negative repercussions of giving a government more power than the people, what Hobbes advocates for in the *Leviathan*. The United States in their

colonization of Puerto Rico have ill-treated the Puerto Rican populations and have distinctively tried to erase the culture and identity of the Puerto Ricans. Hobbes philosophy is an argument for colonial forces. Where Hobbes call for the government to surveil the bad interests of people is a positive attribute in the *Leviathan*, his call for an absolute monarchy is where his philosophy fails and where Butler's philosophy can be applied.

Colonialism is not an act of what Butler refers to as interdependency, what some may argue, but rather a failure of protecting the rights that are guaranteed to beings. As Butler affirmed, people are subjected to certain conditions of life such as the right to protection. I would argue that one of the conditions that we are guaranteed as part of our right to protection is our right to have our own identity. Interdependency fosters individualism while also promoting the understanding that despite our differences our lives are connected. Butler's politics dismantles Hobbes power hierarchy because of this. She does not call for a race of people to have a singular identity but believes we can respect and work together despite having multiple cultures.

It is apparent that the United States has egregiously injured Puerto Ricans because of its colonial efforts. Presently, however, we still see traces as well as signs of the United States continual efforts to refuse to treat Puerto Rico with what Butler refers to as equal grievability. We will see this in the next section.

Hurricane Irma & Maria

On September 7th, 2017, Hurricane Irma hit the Atlantic and was reported as the most powerful hurricane in recorded history. The category five storm skirted Puerto Rico downing power lines and causing major flood issues. Hurricane Irma left approximately 1 million people

without power. At least three people were killed due to the storm, and more than 56,000 people were without potable water.

Just weeks after Hurricane Irma swept the island of Puerto Rico, the morning of September 20th, 2017 Puerto Rico was struck with an even worse storm to hit the island in 89 years, Hurricane Maria. While Puerto Rico was still trying to recover from the preceding storm, Hurricane Irma, the powerful Category 4 storm plowed through the island two weeks after Hurricane Irma completely obliterating the roofs of homes leaving thousands of residents homeless and causing serious flood issues: “In some areas, floodwaters were waist-high—more than 30 inches deep—and often sewage-ridden. Less than one percent of homeowners had flood insurance” (Mercy Corps). Many residents were forced to cross swollen rivers after bridges collapsed to retrieve water, gas, and other necessities for their families. More than eighty percent of Puerto Rico’s power lines were knocked down, leaving an estimated 3.4 million residents without electricity. Thousands of homes, businesses, and hospitals were left in the dark for months. The island was shrouded as the largest blackout in U.S history and the second-largest globally.

Besides, the outage sparked a significant health care crisis. Necessary medical equipment and medications were inaccessible:

“Vital medical equipment like dialysis machines couldn’t run. Medicines like insulin went bad. Perhaps most critically, water pumps shut off. That forced some residents to drink from contaminated sources. Sanitation networks failed, helping feed a leptospirosis outbreak” (Barclay).

Essential human needs were denied to Puerto Rican residents. Thus, the death toll of the hurricane continued to increase even after the storm passed the island. It was reported that “researchers from George Washington University, who conducted the most comprehensive study on the question to date, that the best estimate is that 2,975 people died as a consequence of the storm” (Barclay). The government of Puerto Rico officially confirmed this number shortly after the study. However, even this number confirmed by the government may be an underestimate to the death toll caused by the storm. A group of Harvard researchers estimated in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that up to 4,600 people likely died as a result of Hurricane Maria. If true, Hurricane Maria would be considered the deadliest storm to have hit United States soil.

Unfortunately, Puerto Rico’s economy had already been shrinking before the storm hit the island with more than a \$70 billion debt, half of the residents living below the poverty line, and its unemployment rate tripled compared to other states in the United States. Though there was speculation that the storm estimated a \$43 billion loss, a study commissioned by a Puerto Rican consulting firm H. Calero assessed that the impact of both storms—Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria—estimated to cost between \$139 billion and \$159 billion. The magnitude of the storm is projected to impact the island for a long time.

More than 135,000 Puerto Ricans have left their homes and settled in the continental U.S since the storm. The storm wrecked the island and plunged the Puerto Rican residents into a grave humanitarian crisis. It has also been speculated that the number of residents vacating the island will only continue to increase as the island is recovering from the damage caused by the two storms.

In the present-day, the tension between the U.S and Puerto Rico remains, especially after Hurricane Maria. Despite the findings of the combined studies from George Washington University and Harvard University, the United States President denied the death toll statistics. On his social media, he wrote, "3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes that hit the Democrats did Puerto Rico this to make me look as bad as possible" (Oppenheimer). President Donald Trump was infamously criticized for minimal efforts to help restore Puerto Rico and his negligent support. Many Puerto Ricans were left outraged by the lack of support. This led to many protestors, including United Nations experts, criticizing the United States' sluggish response to the emergency at Puerto Rico. In a statement in the United Nations, the advocates stressed that "more than 80% of Puerto Rico's population, or about 2.8 million people, still lack electricity, while most hospitals are non-functioning. After most of the crops were destroyed, many have been left without food" (Barron). While Puerto Rico was experiencing the severe repercussions of the hurricanes, there were financial and regulatory barriers imposed by the U.S. Puerto Rico's basic human needs weren't being adequately addressed by the country that was principally responsible for doing so.

Evaluating these past occurrences with Puerto Rico, it is evident that the United States continually refuses to grieve for the Puerto Ricans and in return refuses to acknowledge them as beings. President Trump refusing to accept the reported death toll in Puerto Rico is a deliberate refusal to grieve for the citizens. Their lives are not being protected when they are in a vulnerable position after the hurricanes. Puerto Rico still faces many hardships because of the storms and their needs have been completely neglected. They are being denied their rights as beings. A life

is considered worthy if it is being grieved. The question that then arises is what should be the next step for Puerto Rico?

Puerto Rico in the United Nations

The cry for Puerto Rico to get acknowledged within the scope of the United Nations is not new. Puerto Rico's fight for self-determination dates back to 1953 and has been a remarkable issue the last several years. At first, Puerto Rico was considered a Non-Self-Governing Territory until Resolution 748 (VII) was passed, removing them from that list. It was in 1953 when the U.S.-sponsored proposal, Resolution 748 (VII), to remove the island from its list of colonized nations, following the establishment of its "commonwealth" relationship with the United States was passed. The resolution noted, " Puerto Rican people had exercised their self-determination," that the country had "achieved attributes of political sovereignty," and that "the requirement of providing information to the General Assembly will end" (Lopez). Thus, Puerto Rico does not have an official seat at the United Nations.

Although the United Nations committee has reiterated Puerto Rico's right to self-determination over the years, it had not formally requested the General Assembly's review of the issue. It wasn't until 1960 that the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1514 (XV), which "solemnly proclaims the need to remedy immediately and unconditionally the colonial situation in all its forms and manifestations" (Lopez). It furthermore declared that 'steps must be taken to transfer all the power to all the peoples and all the territories which have not gained their independence.' This led to the creation of what is now known as the Special Decolonization Committee. The committee was responsible for ensuring that the territories which did not have independence was represented and had the platform to discuss their issues. The committee was

also responsible for hearing the testimonies of repression and harassment committed against pro-independence organizations and people by the U.S. police forces and intelligence agencies. The question of Puerto Rico's right to self-determination in the United Nations is still a relevant issue today, especially amidst the devastation from the two hurricanes. Shortly after the hurricane, independence activists failed to get on the General Assembly 2017 Agenda. For the past 37 years, Puerto Rican attorneys Olga Sanabria Dávila and Wilma Reverón Collazo have continuously brought the case for Puerto Rico's self-determination before the Special Committee on Decolonization in the United Nations.

Following the denial of recognition in the United Nations, Dávila, president of the Committee for Puerto Rico stated, "Colonialism develops a relationship of power, of the colonizer having an overwhelming power over the colonized," said Sanabria, "In order for that legitimate process of decolonization to take place, the process has to be defined in such a way that this unequal relationship of power is somehow addressed" (Lopez). An ethical representation cannot happen until colonialism is removed. It is impossible to think of having ethical representation without getting rid of colonial power. By continuing a cycle that has colonial power it just establishes the idea of there being an other.

Statements from Petitioners

In 2018, more than 40 petitioners from different advocacy groups addressed Special Committee, many denouncing the colonial occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States. Many expressed their outrage over the Government's lack of support amidst the 2017 hurricanes. The petitioners had several representatives including a Puerto Rican political prisoner held in the U.S, a representative from the New York State Nurses Association, representatives of various Latin

American countries, and representatives from various organizations.¹ Each of these petitioners listed challenged the General Assembly for different issues that have impacted Puerto Rico since the colonization by the U.S. Notably, Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez discussed the health impacts of the colonization before and after the hurricanes. She noted higher indices of morbidity and mortality as well as the rise of other diseases. It was stated that poisonous detritus from military exercises, water contamination from pharmaceuticals and coal ash deposits, among other factors, had all contributed to cancers and respiratory and endocrine disorders. Gonzalez reported that because of The Jones Act, it was impossible to import healthy foods affordable and that quality health care was inaccessible to the residents of Puerto Rico. A health crisis was already underway even before the hurricanes hit Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, the situation morphed to what petitioner Gonzalez claimed as a genocide conducted by the United States.

A representative from the Indigenous Women's Knowledge stated that the ongoing imposition of restrictive laws and regulations on Puerto Rico by the United States, as well as that country's careless and cavalier approach to the death and damage occasioned by the recent hurricanes, were continued proof of the colonial relationship between the Territory and the United States. Although Puerto Rican residents were taxed and regulated by the United States,

¹ “The Special Committee also heard the following petitioners: Colegio de Abogados y Abogados de Puerto Rico; Union de Trabajadores de la Industria Eléctrica y Riego; Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico; National Jericho Movement; A Call to Action on Puerto Rico; National Sovereign State of Borinken; Indigenous Women's Knowledge; Mesa de Trabajo por Ana Belen Montes en Puerto Rico; Fuerza de la Revolución; Puerto Rican Independence Party; Committee for Puerto Rico at the United Nations; National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico; New York Cuba Solidarity Project; Movimiento Nin Negron; American Association of Jurists; Comite Pro Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico; Alianza Patria; Movimiento Union Soberanista; Comites de la Resistencia Boricua; Puerto Rican Coalition against Death Penalty; Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales; Generacion 51; Puertorriqueños Unidos en Accion; Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico; Socialist Workers Party; Consejo Amplio Unitario de Solidaridad y Acción; Vidas Viequenses Valen; Junte de Mujeres; Partido de Pueblo Trabajador; and Brigada Guarionex.

they were not permitted representation within the country's government, a clear indicator of colonialism. Whether it was intentional, thousands of people suffered in silence.

Another representative one from Socialist Workers Party John Studer said he had met recently with workers, unionists, fishermen, and students in Yabucoa, Humacao and other areas hit by Hurricane Maria, who were protesting that, nine months after that disaster, tens of thousands still lacked electricity. Calling the hurricane's impact a "social catastrophe created by colonial domination and capitalist rule," he said the United States -appointed Fiscal Control Board had slashed jobs, closed schools and increased tuition at the University of Puerto Rico. He was emphasizing that the fight for Puerto Rico's independence from Washington was in the interests of working people in the United States.

The problem that I am discussing raises the question of the other. The United Nations, by neglecting to include Puerto Rico in the scope of their discussions and decision making, has constructed Puerto Rico as the other. This concrete data exemplifies what it means to be the other. The repercussions of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria is the experience of being the other.

The issue that we then often encounter is within these institutions that try to reflect a universal standard. In trying to indicate a universal standard, individual interests are ignored and often silenced to serve what they believe is the "greater good. " Many disadvantaged groups of people, the other, are often invisible in ethical decision-making processes. In doing this, they do not, in fact, reflect a moral standard: "the social problem of the divergence between the universal interest and the particular interest, the interests of particular individuals, is what goes on to make up the problem of morality" (An Account of Oneself 5). The universal many times fail to agree

and to include the individual. We can imagine, in the context of this paper, the imposition of the United States representing Puerto Rico in the confines of the United Nations in the name of universal principles of democracy, where the United States continues to ignore the voices and needs of Puerto Ricans.

The United Nations has typically served as a platform to reflect, in some ways, the moral law. The problem is not the intention of the system but the way that it is executed. The United Nations is currently made up of 193 member states; including one of the most powerful nation-states, the United States. The main organs of the UN are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat. For a country or a state to be recognized as a nation state they must undergo an application process² Which at each session, the General Assembly considers the credentials of all representatives of Member States participating in that session. During such a consideration, which routinely takes place first in the nine-member Credentials Committee but can also arise at other times, the issue can be raised whether a particular representative has been accredited by the Government actually in power. A majority vote ultimately decides the application of that state or country in the Assembly. It should be noted that the normal change of Governments, as through a democratic election, does not raise any issues concerning the credentials of the representative of the State concerned. Though, Puerto Rico has

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- ²1. . The State submits an application to the Secretary-General and a letter formally stating that it accepts the obligations under the Charter.
 2. The Security Council considers the application. Any recommendation for admission must receive the affirmative votes of 9 of the 15 members of the Council, provided that none of its five permanent members — China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America — have voted against the application.
 3. If the Council recommends admission, the recommendation is presented to the General Assembly for consideration. A two-thirds majority vote is necessary for the Assembly for admission of a new State.
 4. Membership becomes effective the date the resolution for admission is adopted.

continuously advocated for self-determination they have been denied this opportunity time and time again.

Again, the problem of the United Nations is not the issue of them trying to promote a system of ubiquitous norms or goods. As Butler states, “the problem is not with universality as such but with an operation of universality that fails to be responsive to cultural particularity and fails to undergo a reformulation of itself in response to the social and cultural conditions it includes within the scope of applicability” (An Account of Oneself 6). The United Nations cannot possibly represent a common standard when there are countries such as Puerto Rico who are neglected out of the conversations. However, the main issue does not lie with the foundation of the United Nations. Indeed, the United Nations is intended to reflect a universal standard of justice. The issue, in the case of Puerto Rico, lies with the United States. Even though, the U.S, specifically, is supposed to represent the people of Puerto Rico they do not. We can consider the United States to be a form of universality. Thus, the United States’ is a failed form of universality neglecting to include Puerto Rico's particularity. Puerto Rico can be classified as precarious lives.

During the Commission on the Status of Women, the U.S representative was utterly absent from the convention and all decision making processes. The priority theme focused on rural women and girls. The convention was approximately five months after Hurricane Irma and Maria struck the island. The group of people who were most affected by the hurricanes was women. In actuality, women are the forefront leaders in the Puerto Rican communities. A civil engineering PhD candidate, Christiana Smyrilli, at the University of Cambridge in the U.K., recently conducted a comparative study in Puerto Rico on how water and sanitation issues after

the hurricanes affected both women and men. Smyrilli found that the impact was more significant on women because of their household responsibilities:

“Due to the delayed response in getting clean water to affected residents, men often were responsible for carrying water home from natural water sources or water tanks. But the work of cooking and cleaning and managing limited water supplies fell on women”
(Calma).

The women not only experienced an emotional burden with their domestic roles but also economically. It was challenging for women to find employment because they were responsible for taking care of their children since the schools were closed. These particular setbacks, unique to Puerto Rican women, were completely absent in the United Nations. We can classify the women in Puerto Rico as the precarious others.

To return to one of the questions that I set forth at the outset of this section, why preserve the life of Puerto Ricans? To say that we have an obligation to preserve our own lives is to say that we have the responsibility to preserve the lives of others. The Puerto Ricans are without a doubt, an oppressed group of people. The United States has an ethical obligation to safeguard the Puerto Ricans because they are the precarious other. If the United Nations and the United States was structured in radical equality that meant every life is worth preserving and every loss would be lamented then this would resolve the issues that were faced in Puerto Rico. We are obligated to grieve for the precarious life: "Grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start" (Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable 15). Grievability reflects sympathy. Due to the fact that the United States, colonized

Puerto Rico and represented them in the United Nations then they should be able to sympathize with them and give them the proper representation.

Butler in her lecture at Yale University analyzes philosopher Melanie Klein's concept of sympathy in her discussion of the other. For Klein, we develop moral responses in reaction to questions of our own survivability. She offers a solution to situations like those in Puerto Rico and maintains that desire to make an appeal to others is having strong feelings of responsibility and putting ourselves in their shoes. We are only able to disregard our own feelings and desires and put that person's feelings first if we are able to identify as them. Klein believes that we reenact fantasy in ways that we wish we were treated. She outlines that we act in a parent-child relationship. Klein gives us a different way of analyzing sympathy. She looks specifically at grievance and guilt which comes in different forms; whether it may come in love or in reproach. Sympathy for Klein is linked with the feeling of hatred or aggression. Sympathy is used as a replay to have those feelings from the child and the mother. Their initial bond the child has with its mother begins at conception. A child is grown in the womb of the mother, fed, and kept secure. Once the child is born that bond is broken. The child comes into the world neurotic at the separation of the mother. The birth is the pain that inflicted the baby. In addition, the infant may feel comfortable when they are breastfeeding but then returns to aggressive behavior when separated. Klein proclaims that first, we act in aggressive behaviors and are always trying to repair the destruction we experience because our bodies are inseparable from our mothers.

Butler agrees with Klein's notion that beings are in constant modes of survivability but expands on this idea to state that our modes of survivability have to be in relation to others: "After all, if my survivability depends on a relation to others, to a "you" or a set of "yous"

without whom I cannot exist, then my existence is not mine alone, but is to be found outside myself, in this set of relations that precede and exceed the boundaries of who I am" (Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable). It is within my perspective that the idea of the other emerges after this separation. Children are no longer in thought with another human being but begin to learn how to survive on its own execute actions that benefit them. However, if we try to return to the thinking that was first established at conception we can begin to treat the other in a different light; this is what Butler promotes in her ideas regarding interdependency.

Findings & Recommendations

Amidst the two hurricanes in Puerto Rico, the major issue that I became cognizant of is the negligence of the United States in representing Puerto Rico in the United States. I found that none of the United Nations delegates, member states, or agendas for the particular conferences reflected any of the sufferings experienced by Puerto Rico citizens amidst their humanitarian crisis. It has come to my attention to the systems of the United Nations is severely flawed. The United States neglected to report the crisis regarding Puerto Rico to the United Nations. Even as petitioners successfully advocated for support from their member state, the United States, and received unanimous support from the United Nations General Assembly no efforts were done to obligate the United States to do so officially. It has come to my attention, that the best resolution for Puerto Rico is to give them a seat in the United Nations. In this section, I will explain how we come to this conclusion with a philosophical analysis of Immanuel Kant and Judith Butler. We need to reevaluate our own actions in the United States and ask how our actions are causing their downfalls. As Butler states,

“In asking whether we caused such suffering, we are being asked by an established authority not only to avow a causal link between our own actions and the suffering that follows but also to take responsibility for these actions and their effects” (Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable 10).

Accountability needs to be taken into account in order to break the oppressor and oppressed relationship existent with the United States and Puerto Rico. As Klein suggested, we need to sympathize with Puerto Rico. The Puerto Ricans have been neglected because they are unable to self-determination since they are a colonized country from the United States and because they are not considered a Nation State.

In Kant's book, *The Metaphysics of Morals* he derives a moral theory that stems from his idea of the goodwill. For Kant the only thing that can be considered good in this world is a good will because even if an action is mal-intentioned the result of that action still produces goodness. (Kant 9). With a good will there are specific obligations people must follow; Kant refers to those obligations as duties. I believe that everyone has a duty in the legal aspect. After analyzing the work of Kant we may make a few general suggestions about duty and the good will. First, actions are genuinely good when they are commenced for the sake of duty alone. By stripping away, the desires of the self people can ultimately make more rational decisions for all people. People must act in conformity with duty out of some selfish interest or coercion. Actions are not supposed to be judged according to the motivation or purpose they were meant to bring about, but rather by what Kant identifies as the maxim, the principle that served as their purpose. Finally, duties then should be carried out of reverence for the law. When beings have reverence for the law they have respect that the law is an imperative of reason that transcends all other

concerns and interests. For Kant a being can be considered rational if they can recognize a general moral law and act out of respect for it. (Kant 360).

The moral law cannot be a specific stipulation to do or not to do a particular action because every occurrence is different in its nature. Naturally, it is impossible to derive universally accepted ideas. Thus, Kant implies that the moral law must be applicable in all situations. He concludes that the law of morality is that we should act in such a way that we could want the maxim of our action to become a universal law; this is what Kant refers to as the categorical imperative. Using this moral formula today would be very helpful in the legal system because in doing so we would assure that everyone's lives are secure and taken into account. On the contrary, Butler believes that Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative is a contradiction. She asks herself: If I were a Kantian would I act in a certain way would everyone act that way? The negative and positive formulation, always act in the maxim, contradicts itself. The example she provides for this is lying. Butler reads Kant as paranoia and via the psychoanalytic method. A figurative image of a robber is produced by Kant himself. She provides the following example to explore the issue with Kant. Butler connects Kantian thought process to U.S and Iraq. The idea of a "You strike me, I strike back" type of violence is what is produced if we follow the categorical imperative according to Butler. This gives people justification of defense in the name of self-defense. This is where Butler's theories fall short. Kant's philosophy is related to Butler. Kant's humanity principle that declares one to act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only parallels Butler's principle of grievability. For Kant, "humanity" refers to people's uniquely human characteristics, their rational characteristics, including autonomy and the capacity to understand the world and to

form and pursue life-plans. Thus, his formula of humanity demands that people always act so that they respect themselves and others as beings with a rational nature. This is a basic argument that opposes Butler's criticism of the categorical imperative because the humanity principle is against injury of all other persons. Therefore, if we take a closer look at the situation presented in this paper we can establish a resolution using the categorical imperative while also incorporating aspects of Butler's theories surrounding grievability. The formula would be presented this way:

Act in such a way that we could want the maxim of our action to become a universal law;

The maxim meaning ensuring that all voices are going to hear, validated, and included in the decision making processes within the United Nations. This would have to consider not only Puerto Rico but also all groups of people including indigenous groups, women, the disabled; these groups have been notoriously neglected in the United Nations. There are a number of ways the United Nations can do to ensure that this maxim I recommend is followed. The problem that Puerto Rico faces is that although they are expected to be represented by the United States they are not. If the United Nations put accountability on the United States to represent Puerto Rico by presenting them with obligations this issue would probably have arisen. However, because the United States is negligent in doing their duties then we would have to address the situation as is understanding that there have not been any drastic measures to change this. The United States refuses to grieve the citizens of Puerto Rico and thus, refuses to value them as lives. So, if we follow the categorical imperative that I set forth, in listening to the petitioners of Puerto Rico we would allow them to self-determinate. There is much evidence, both present and historically, to show that Puerto Rico needs its independence from the United States in regards to their position at the United Nations.

I believe that it is evident that the United States government in many ways conducts itself in the same light as a Hobbesian and Kantian state. Laws and institutions such as the United Nations were created to protect people from themselves and from the horrors of other people's intentions. However, because there is a power dynamic between Nation-states and people outside of the General Assembly there is a misconception that the resolutions created and reflected through the U.N are what is best globally. The United States has historically and presently treated Puerto Rico as the other despite the fact they are supposed to be included in their "we." Dated from the 1800s the United States has acted as an abusive colonial power trying to "Americanize" the Puerto Rican people while still holding power over them. Puerto Ricans participate in American wars, are huge contributors to profitable industries, and yet they are regarded as complete second class U.S citizens. However, in order to ensure that institutions are morally rooted we need to recognize every being, grieve lives that are lost, and follow the categorical imperative recommended by Immanuel Kant. If we can assure that the laws, we create will not negatively affect anyone in society and can be held at a universal moral standard then we can state that we have an effective government.

Conclusion & Discussion

I believe that my project is unique to other reports, regarding this subject matter, in the current field of philosophy. Though I have read other reports from political theorists regarding the current political status of Puerto Rico my research delves into evaluating the situation through a philosophical lens. Understanding how we have developed the idea of the other ourselves and understanding how we can reimagine a society without the other is key to this

research project. Using Puerto Rico as the case study for this general issue shows how it is impossible to reimagine the precarious other and restructure our treatment towards them.

From this research I learned, a lot regarding the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S and just how colonialism plays a major role in developing the idea of the other. I became aware of the many efforts of Puerto Rican advocates within the United Nations fighting for their voices to be heard and how the United Nations needs a reevaluation on their process of admitting member states. I understood that every culture has particularities that need to be ingrained into our universal ideals. Finally, I was able to critically come up with a solution to the problem that I had encountered.

I believe that the next step in this research project is one to distribute this paper as an advocacy piece to other people in the field of the United Nations. In writing this paper, I feel that I have served as an advocate for my culture.

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