

LOS MUROS HABLAN: PROTEST AND PROVOCATION IN PUERTO RICAN FEMINIST MURALISM

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the all-women art collective *Colectivo Moriviví* created a mural titled “Paz para la mujer” to promote awareness regarding gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. The mural depicted two nude women of color that covered their faces with their arms as if defending themselves from a violent blow. Months later, the mural was defaced by a group of people who decided to cover the two women’s nudity by painting white underwear on them. This essay further analyzes the racial, national, and patriarchal implications of this act of censorship and argues that the defacement was a reaction to the mural as it represented a form of provocation. The essay is divided in four parts in order to provide context, to discuss the functions of graffiti and murals, to set the framework for a study of provocation, and to discuss the reception and repercussions of the “Paz para la mujer” mural.

Keywords: Colectivo Moriviví, feminist art, muralism, provocation, censorship, Puerto Rico

RESUMEN

En el 2015, un colectivo de mujeres conocido como Colectivo Moriviví creó un mural titulado “Paz para la mujer” para llamar

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atención a la violencia de género en Puerto Rico. El mural representaba a dos mujeres negras desnudas que se cubrían la cara con los brazos como si se defendieran de un golpe. Unos meses más tarde, el mural fue censurado por un grupo de personas que decidieron cubrir la desnudez de las dos mujeres representadas pintándoles ropa interior blanca. Este ensayo analiza las implicaciones raciales, nacionales y patriarcales detrás de este acto de censura y arguye que la censura fue una reacción al mural ya que representaba una forma de provocación. El ensayo se divide en cuatro partes con el fin de proveer contexto, de discutir las funciones del graffiti y los murales, de brindar un marco de estudio de la provocación y para discutir la recepción y repercusiones del mural “Paz para la mujer”.

Palabras claves: colectivo Moriviví, arte feminista, muralismo, provocación, censura, Puerto Rico

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1. INTRODUCTION

When we speak of Puerto Rico, we speak of a cultural hybrid, a Spanglish-speaking, non-incorporated territory, that until recently was nearly invisible beyond the Billboards and celebrities. However, in light of the seventy two billion dollar debt, the general crisis exacerbated by hurricane María, and the subsequent political battle unleashed between the local government and the President of the United States, the island has drawn a significant amount of attention. A lot of the media and articles produced during the aftermath of the hurricane and in response to the country’s dire financial situation, reveal just how little power the local government and citizens have to create change without consent from Congress. Due to the island’s perpetual colonial status, the image of Puerto Ricans as docile (coined by René Marqués), passive, and incapable of self-government has prevailed. For this reason, I am interested in considering how Puerto Rican artists and cultural agents engage in artistic, rather than armed, insurrections.

Broadly speaking, what I propose in my research is that Puerto Rican artists and cultural agents representing, or coming from marginal communities, have relied on provocative aesthetics and

rhetoric to convey dissidence, social malaise, and to rebel —metaphorically— against national and colonial order. These provocative cultural artifacts trigger authorities and/or the general public in ways that confirm a lack of tolerance for certain artistic depictions, content, and aesthetics—especially those that highlight the experience of women, people of color (POC), trans, and queer individuals. Furthermore, I am drawn to incidents in which the intolerance triggers authorities to respond to cultural artifacts in highly visible ways that are often symptomatic of moral panics. Although my research looks at a multidisciplinary body of works evolving around queer, feminist, and anti-colonial issues, on this occasion, I would like to focus on feminist mural art as a potential practice of provocation. In this essay I aim to do four things: 1) provide a brief commentary on the tradition of mural art and graffiti, 2) discuss what provocation means in my research, and show how murals, depending on their content and aesthetics, provoke or trigger spectators in different ways —such as vandalism, censorship and legal measures activated by the State, 3) provide a close reading of a feminist mural and its reception, and 4) conclude with a reflection on how provocative artifacts and the acts that censor them, contribute to their visibility.

2. MURAL ART AND GRAFFITI

When we talk about muralist art, names like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Orozco —major figures of the Mexican muralist movement— come to mind. Even though mural art as we know it today was mainly popularized by Mexican artists, this practice has been adopted by an extensive list of countries throughout Latin America and North America, the Caribbean, and beyond. In the United States, this practice has been especially prevalent among disenfranchised communities —especially predominantly black, Chicana/o and Latinx communities in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, and Los Angeles, and can also be seen in countries like Nicaragua, Chile, Argentina and Spain— to mention a few, that have experienced dictatorships, wars, and times of socio-political upheaval (see Sperling, Cockcroft & Weber).

Historically, street art has served as a device for certain groups, often those excluded from dominant culture, to express themselves.

While graffiti is not a recent practice, it was not until the 19th century that public opinion turned against graffiti due to “the relationship between the working classes, who are imagined to be the authors of the graffiti, and the elite, who dominated cultural production” (Lewisoohn 27). However, both those in power and those subjected by it have long implemented the practice of street art. In Lyman Chaffee’s words, “street art’s importance can be seen in repressive regimes where authoritarian systems attempt to reduce public space, including opposition street graphics. Street art breaks with the conspiracy of silence” (4).

The authors of *Toward a People’s Art* trace the origin of the muralist movement in the U.S. back to the late 60s, to 1967 more precisely, with the emergence of the first “Wall of Respect” created in Chicago by the Visual Arts Workshop of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC), a multidisciplinary collective of artists and intellectuals active during the Civil Rights Movement. The “Wall of Respect” was a community endeavor and it depicted portraits of different African American historical figures. Considering that marginalized communities have long been excluded from engaging in their own representation, the “Wall of Respect” was powerful because, in the authors’ words, it was a way of stating, “black people have the right to define black culture and black history for themselves, to name their own heroes” (Sperling et al. 3). The “Wall of Respect” was widely adopted by other black and Latinx communities in order to strengthen community ties, provide lessons on the history of those communities, and encourage pride and empowerment amongst people commonly subjugated by systemic violence. These sites of visual homage and memory preservation which are abundant in places like Humboldt Park in Chicago, El Barrio in New York City, Chicana Park in San Diego or “The Great Wall” in Los Angeles, were often modified to stay updated to the current context and continue to fulfill their social function—to serve as sites of pride and memory preservation.

The authors of *Toward a People’s Art* define mural art as a “painting wedded to architecture, public art conceived in a given space, art rooted in a specific human context” (Sperling et al. xxiv). What this definition does not include, and is a crucial aspect of mural art

when compared to graffiti, is that most murals are the result of a commission or a community endeavor, and in both instances they count with different forms of institutional support and authorization. Graffiti, on the other hand, is notorious for being construed as a relatively criminal practice, hardly ever considered art, which intervenes in public and private property in less tolerable ways. In fact, while mural art is predominantly believed to embellish neighborhoods, to enforce community bonds, and to provide communities with tokens of cultural tribute and pride, graffiti is commonly perceived as filth, stain, a symptom of social disorder, and has been, more often than murals, a site of censorship and contention (see Ferrell). In spite of the growing popularity of graffiti, cities and other private and public organizations continue to promote mural art campaigns as a way “to prevent or discourage graffiti on public and private property, thereby establishing muralism as the remedy to the graffiti ‘problem’” (Latorre 104). There are many competing understandings of what graffiti is; however, in my research, graffiti is predominantly —but not exclusively— the practice of writing words on public surfaces and is guided by a will to communicate rather than to necessarily meet the aesthetic standards of mural art. Graffiti, according to Jeff Ferrell, “unfolds within systems of legal and economic domination, systems which guarantee unequal access to private property and cultural resources” (171). Two main reasons why graffiti tends to be less acceptable than muralism are: 1) because it is rarely authorized and 2) because it falls into what Ferrell calls a crime of style, meaning graffiti is not necessarily governed by the same aesthetic values and regulating standards that condition mural art.

Since graffiti occurs as an individualistic or isolated practice, taking place beyond communities and art collectives, it does not adjust itself to dominant standards of style and content in the ways mural art does. Besides city efforts to erase graffiti from public spaces, legal measures have been articulated to forbid this practice and, at the same time, encourage the regulated and consented practice of mural art instead. My intention here is not to argue whether or not graffiti, as the unauthorized practice of inscribing names and words on public and private property, should be acceptable, but rather to reflect on what forms of expression are dee-

med as socially acceptable because they align with certain aesthetic standards and serve urban, commercial, and propagandistic purposes. Furthermore, I am interested in the ways graffiti and mural art can trigger, or more specifically provoke, spectators and authorities to react depending on their content, location, and aesthetics, and how these reactions reflect the continuance of important, unresolved issues that afflict different communities.

3. PROVOCATION AND ITS HISTORY

In my research, to speak of provocation is to speak of a form of transgression, a violation of the norm, an offense to the prevailing order of things (Vaquer Fernández). However, by definition, provocations go a step further than transgressions because they incite and provoke reactions. In this sense, for something to be considered a provocation, the initial act or speech must lead to some sort of repercussion or reaction. Unfortunately, it is likely that many might have heard the word provocation in cases of murder, rape or sexual assault when people claim to have been provoked in circumstances that end in sexual and/or violent outcomes. This claim not only points to an alleged moment of human frailty or loss of self-control, but it suggests that the sexual and/or violent response was proportional to the initial, voluntary or involuntary, act, speech or behavior. In other words, to be provoked by someone implies that that person was an active agent in his/her/their own outcome.

While I do not intend to engage in a long discussion of the history of provocation, it is important to acknowledge that the way we use the term in current society is connected to the legal defense of provocation originated in 17th century England and adopted by other countries in Europe, parts of Latin America, the U.S., and other places, where it is still available. The defense was created under the belief men had the right and duty to respond with violence or excessive use of force if their honor or property were at risk. It is widely known that wives were also considered a form of male property. Therefore, the defense of provocation encouraged and legitimated the violent assertion of masculinity and authority, especially in cases of domestic violence or “crimes of passion.” These violent

responses were interpreted as the recuperation of their honor and, furthermore, social order. By claiming provocation the individual would most likely receive a lighter sentence. Even though women can also claim they were provoked in cases of domestic violence, they usually do so in cases of self-defense rather than dishonor, and they are also less successful in being granted this concession. In Caroline Forrell's words,

Women commit domestic homicide much less frequently than do men. When they do kill, they usually kill their batterers out of fear and despair. In all three countries [United States, Canada and Australia], battered women who kill routinely rely on provocation or some other basis for reducing murder to manslaughter because their often more appropriate claims of self defense, that would result in acquittal, fail. Thus, provocation is usually viewed as a backup defense for battered women.

Battered women's self-defense claims too frequently fail because, like provocation, self-defense was designed with men's conduct in mind (33-34).

Although the legal defense of provocation has evolved in the last centuries, it continues to be a source of significant controversy due to its intrinsic gender bias and anachronism. However, in spite of the controversy, it has only been abolished in parts of Australia. I devote other areas of my research to study the homosexual advance defense and the gay and trans panic defenses. These defenses stem from the defense of provocation and also shift the guilt from perpetrator to victim, to stress how the law justifies violence committed predominantly by men targeting POC, women, queer and trans individuals to promote hypermasculine and heteronormative standards. In this sense, those acts of violence seek to discourage the public proliferation of provocations by retaliating against them, and could be interpreted as forms of service necessary for patriarchal order to prevail.

In my research, I draw from the legal aspects of provocation and propose provocations are both the public display of gender, sexual or political non-compliance that threatens patriarchal order, and the positive and negative reactions these displays elicit. In other words, the cultural artifacts I study are, to certain extent, parallel to the

legal scenarios in which claiming provocation serves to justify measures taken to suppress the alleged provocative performance or, more specifically, the provocative artifact, from the public sphere. Simultaneously, measures such as violence, censorship or legislations targeting certain musical, visual, performative, and literary works are construed as necessary to maintain social order through moral panics commonly associated to the patriarchy and national discourse. Furthermore, provocations are often a bidirectional dynamic. There is an initial act, speech or behavior that is publicly manifested and entails a threat or destabilizing force to social order because it refuses to perpetuate the *status quo*.

Considering the defense of provocation was originated to ultimately protect men, their honor, and their property one could argue that, to certain extent, anti-graffiti campaigns' responses to graffiti reveal the provocative potential behind this practice due to the threat it poses to public and private property. What we see is an initial transgression on property that triggers a State response meant to eliminate the provocation from the public sphere and discourage its proliferation. In other words, the State asserts its authority by forbidding these practices in public and visible ways to discourage others from engaging in them as well. However, the State is not the only entity that reacts, there are plenty ordinary individuals that also seek to suppress provocative performances and artifacts from the public eye to maintain social order. But what type of depictions trigger censorship, and can these acts of censorship be read as indicators of the social climate?

4. COLECTIVO MORIVIVÍ, MURAL AND RECEPTION

In Puerto Rico, mural art and graffiti have been alive and thriving for decades now, and like in the U.S., graffiti has often been censored by the State and murals have been a site of dialogue and intervention. In 2013, the first highly visible, all-female Puerto Rican art collective, *Colectivo Moriviví*, originated when several students from the visual arts high school known as *Escuela Especializada Central de Artes Visuales* in the metropolitan area of Santurce, came together to participate in the popular urban arts festival *Santurce es Ley*. Although this festival has gained international attention and participation as a

multidisciplinary event, it mainly stands out as a mural art festival in which different collectives from all over the world come to conquer a wall with a piece of their own design.

I should point out that the Spanish word “moriviví” combines the first person preterit of “to die” (*morí*) and “to live” (*viví*). In Puerto Rico there is a plant called “moriviví”, also known as the shy plant; its scientific name is *mimosa pudica* and, similar to tulips, it closes its leaves when touched. The moriviví plant has also been a common feature in nationalist, pro-independence Puerto Rican poetry. The collective chose this name because they wanted to call attention to their resilience as women and that of the Puerto Rican people. While the group did not anticipate becoming a collective at the time, they have continued to create murals and, in Raquel Reichard’s words, they have “grown into a popular artistic front known for creating bold, anti-colonial, feminist public art across the archipelago” (Reichard n. p.) Although it is a common belief that mural art is a weapon wielded by marginalized communities to recuperate agency, gain visibility and serve didactic purposes, not all mural art responds to matters of social justice (see Baudrillard, Lewisoohn, Ferrell, Stewart, Latorre). In fact, many studies focus on the ways the muralist practice has been co-opted by different sectors for commercial and urban appearance purposes. In this sense, mural art as a practice mainly rooted in community organizing and political actions for social justice, has become less common.

What we encounter is an increasing amount of murals created without feedback from the communities meant to beautify different neighborhoods and, in many ways, draw the attention of new businesses and developers. However, this is not the case with Moriviví’s work. Not only have they used their art to address issues such as gender violence, sexual liberation, climate change, anti-black racism in Puerto Rico, colonialism and police brutality, but they have done so by collaborating with the communities where the murals would be imprinted and allowing the people to participate in the actual creation of the murals. They believe their art contributes to a larger social movement taking place in Puerto Rico, a country riddled by economic, political and social crisis. In this sense, Moriviví’s work is in

dialogue with the tradition of mural artists who believed this practice has been instrumental to social movements.

In 2015, Moriviví painted an authorized mural in collaboration with an anti-domestic violence organization to draw attention to gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. The mural titled “Paz para la mujer” or “Peace for women” depicted two nude, black women covering their faces with their arms as if shielding themselves from a violent blow, as shown in Figure 1. The two figures are surrounded by monarch butterflies in clear reference to the *Hermanas Mirabal*, the Mirabal sisters, also known as *Las mariposas*, the butterflies. The Mirabal sisters were violently murdered during the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in 1960 for opposing and participating in a clandestine movement against the regime. Trujillo’s response also confirms that the sisters’ political activity was seen as a provocation by the State, and the violent response was both a way to reassert State authority and discourage dissidents. It is worth noting that the mural was created in a neighborhood with a large Dominican population. Unfortunately, Dominican people are often treated as the racialized other or inferior in Puerto Rico, and tend to live in marginal and impoverished communities. Therefore, by including the butterflies, Moriviví not only connects the issue of gender-based violence to a broader transnational experience, but also draws attention to a community rarely acknowledged in spite of the long history that aligns both countries and the contributions of the Dominican people.



Figure 1. “Paz para la mujer” (Peace for Women) by Colectivo Moriviví

As the collective painted the mural, which is located near a highly transited highway, the members of the collective received feedback from pedestrians and drivers that they posted on their Facebook page. Although some celebrated their work and encouraged them to keep going, other people passing by—clearly offended by the figures’ nudity—yelled from their vehicles, “¡pónganle un brassier a las muchachas!” (put a bra on the girls!) (Schwietert Collazo n.p.). In this sense, even before the culmination of the mural, the public was already confirming the depiction’s provocative potential. Several months later, the mural was defaced. To deface something means to disfigure, to spoil the surface or appearance of something by writing or drawing on it, to alter its “face”. A group of vandals painted white undergarments on the figures to cover up their nudity, to make them, as Anastasia Valecce’s has pointed out, “acceptable,” as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. After defacement

In response to this situation, Chachi González, member of the collective, said the “People were upset about the nudity in a public space, and specifically the type of nude body. It was a Black woman who didn’t have a perfect body. One of her breasts was bigger than the other, to reflect many women’s bodies” (Reichard, n.p.). Morivi-ví believes in the importance of being intentional about representing black womanhood, especially in Puerto Rico where there has

been a long history of whitening, or practices of *blanqueamiento*, to “improve the race.” Similarly, I should point out that Moriviví named the larger figure in the mural “Venus,” which might bring to mind Botticelli’s iconic painting: *The Birth of Venus*. However, Moriviví’s reimagining of Venus invites us to reflect on classical beauty as dictated by art specialists, and provides us with a non-white version of Venus that, rather than using her arms to attempt to cover her nudity, uses them to try and protect her face.

Ultimately, many of the messages that came forth in light of the defacing of the murals questioned whether or not this would have happened if the mural depicted a white woman with symmetrical breasts. Those engaging in these conversations knew that there are other murals in the metropolitan area that place the nude female body on display that have not been “covered up.” Similarly, several articles called out the double standard behind this act of vandalism in face of the popularity of hypersexed *reguetón* music and videos. Ultimately, what seems to be a conservative resistance to the mural is a reminder of the social tolerance for female nudity when it comes to women being represented for visual pleasure and not to trigger uncomfortable social awareness, as is the case with this mural.

Shortly after the mural was defaced—a gesture broadly interpreted as an act of censorship—a group of women decided to protest by posing topless in front of the mural. By doing so, the demonstrators not only claimed agency over their bodies, but they publicly embodied the violence the mural represented and made it their own collective experience. In face of the reactions from multiple sectors, not only the women protesting in front of the mural, but the extensive amount of coverage and visibility it gained throughout the following weeks, served to convince the members of the Moriviví Collective that their work was valuable and needed. In the words of Raysa Rodríguez, a member of the collective,

Ante todo ese sufrimiento, como quiera s[intieron] alegría en parte porque esto es una reacción que [les] deja saber que el mural sigue haciendo su función en el público. Esa reacción [les] deja saber la ignorancia que existe y que hay que seguir educando a la gente (Ríos Viner, n.p.).

Valecce interprets the covering of the female figures as a gesture that sought to publicly impose decency while aiming to neutralize the mural's *denuncia*, its social message. However, if we consider this mural as a provocative artifact, we might conclude that rather than neutralizing the message, the defacement actually maximized its potential and contributed to its visibility. In other words, had the mural not triggered discomfort in some spectators to the degree of actually leading them to modify the piece, the protest would not have occurred and many of the conversations about gender-based violence in Puerto Rico would not have either. These conversations did not just focus on forms of, and experiences with, gender-based violence; they also reflected on masculine visual pleasure, on the social imposition of decency and shame on the feminine body, on dominant standards of beauty, and on the objectification of women for commercial consumption.

In Puerto Rico, as in many other places, gender-based violence has been rampant. However, it was not until the last couple of years that people started to organize protests and feminist collectives to promote awareness. In 2015, when the mural was painted, the Puerto Rican society was still very much living up to the popular saying “los trapos sucios se lavan en casa” or “the dirty rags are washed at home”, which socially means certain things should not be discussed in public but rather in the privacy of the home. This saying is typically used in Puerto Rican families to discourage children and mothers from divulging the family's secret dysfunctions or sources of shame. Therefore, in a society that takes pride in not disclosing the family's secrets, a large-scale mural depicting two non-sexualized female figures protecting their faces from a violent assault are, indeed, provocations to the prevailing norm. While I do agree with Valecce and others that have associated the defacement of the mural with intolerance for the black, feminine body, drawing attention to gender-based violence in public, I believe the reaction also tells us something about a desire to erase domestic violence from the public sphere, to cancel it, to dismiss it, to cover up the bodies and what they represent, to demand “the dirty rags be washed at home.”

Certainly, the mural can be interpreted as a provocative artifact as the defacement confirms, but the protest it triggers also suggests

the defacement *per se* was an act of provocation. Moreover, if the initial act of censorship was meant to both erase non-sexualized nudity from the public sphere and the social implications of the mural, it failed. Ultimately, the act of censorship contributed to its visibility. Provocation is, therefore, a bidirectional dynamic in which the cultural agent or artist provokes and triggers the spectator and/or authorities into action, and these actions provoke others.

5. THE POSITIVE REPERCUSSIONS OF CENSORSHIP

In the “Incitement to Discourse,” Michel Foucault discusses how in the 17th century sex became articulated through discourse and people were encouraged by the church to confess explicit details regarding their sexual practices and desires. The fixation with articulating sex had to do with an interest in regulating and policing sexual practices and, more specifically, the body. As expected, same-sex practices and other peripheral sexualities were discouraged and forbidden. By inciting people to disclose and discuss sex, institutional authorities aimed to gain access to the populations’ private lives and, by the same token, exert power over their desires through discourse to “ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative” (Foucault 37). Foucault argues rather than successfully censoring sex, it encouraged it. I draw on Foucault as a parallel given some artists, as the Moriviví Collective, create provocative cultural artifacts triggering others into acts of censorship that ultimately fail and, as Foucault argues in the case of sex, encourage more provocative work to be made visible.

After the incident with Moriviví’s mural, the Collective chose to place pictures of the protest sparked by the defacement on the actual mural. In this sense, the mural gives testimony to an ongoing struggle over gender-based violence, the feminine body, and visibility. Although most provocative artifacts trigger negative reactions, they can also potentially encourage positive ones. Some of the positive reactions after the incident discussed here are a series of feminist initiatives that have emerged to call out the State and police force for its incompetence in handling gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. People have also created different coalitions, have led performances, provided outreach workshops, and organized pro-

tests to demand schools include gender perspectives in their curriculums. After Hurricane María tore through Puerto Rico in 2017, two members of the Moriviví Collective were forced to move to the United States to continue their studies. However, before the hurricane, the Collective had already participated in community collaborations in places like Chicago, Illinois, and Springfield and Holyoke, Massachusetts where they worked closely with disenfranchised communities and Diasporic groups. Additionally, an all-female musical collective, *Plena combativa* or Combative Plena, came together to recuperate the Puerto Rican native rhythm known as *plena* while adapting the once-sexist lyrics to more inclusive ones. Many of these initiatives were triggered, to some extent, by the mural and realizing the impact of its visibility. In other words, provoking discomfort can be a very productive strategy for social movements.

Several years ago I went to New York City to conduct a series of interviews and met with activist Marina Ortiz who has been documenting the mural art created in El Barrio, New York City since the 70s. We walked for nearly four hours up and down Spanish Harlem while she told me the history of each mural, the amount of times they have been restored, and the artists that have neglected their pieces due to political differences and changes of community leaders. There are two things that stood out the most from this conversation: 1) how proud she was to have participated in what had been a collective and community movement, and 2) how disappointed she felt the new murals taking over are created by independent collectives that neither engage with or involve the community, nor deal with explicit social or historical aspects of the people living in El Barrio. Marina Ortiz told me that throughout the 70s to the 90s, the murals were a community affair and people would call out anyone they caught trying to vandalize the pieces. In fact, on multiple occasions the neighbors would gather money to restore the murals themselves, and the people would walk out with improvised palettes and brushes to touch up murals that were weathered or getting dirty. Those murals too were “Walls of Respect” and treated as the community’s cultural property.

As I finished a chapter where I discuss political graffiti and the Moriviví mural I have discussed here (see Vaquer Fernández),

I thought of my talk with Marina Ortiz. The mural “Paz para la mujer” was covered because it depicted an image of Puerto Rican society and women many did not want to see because it gave testament to toxic masculinities, domestic violence and nudity in a frame that was neither pleasant nor a source of pride. Unlike the “Walls of Respect”, what Moriviví makes visible demands, as pointed out by Valecce, answers, dialogue, and solutions. Ultimately, in a society where sex and the feminine body are center stage, the censoring of a mural featuring a violent aspect of Puerto Rican society few wanted to be faced with, inadvertently, revealed the censors’ weakness, to be faced with their own dirty rags.

In conclusion, by reflecting on the practice of mural art and graffiti, we can reevaluate the contexts in which they are created and the societies that provide the conditions for these visual interventions to become manifest. In addition, we can also be more critical about the language employed when subcultural practices such as graffiti or *reguetón* are being criminalized by reconsidering the power dynamics and moral panics that limit access and participation in cultural production. Likewise, we are invited to reconsider why certain depictions have better reception and why others are so short lived. This invites the question, why use provocation as a device or tool to approach cultural work? Because it allows us to see how both those in power and those subjected by it engage in an ongoing dynamic in which those commonly rendered voiceless are made visible. It also reveals how acts of censorship and regulation are legitimated in the name of the common good, the family, or the best interests of the nation. In this sense, provocative cultural artifacts confirm the presence of the disenfranchised, the POC, the queer, and trans individuals many national projects want to erase. And, for that reason, the provocative works I study force the spectator to bare witness to another version of the nation that rather than prompting pride, prompt interventions.

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