Feminist Street Performances

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Feminist Street Performances in Puerto Rico: Alternative Imaginaries Shifting the Ideal(ized) National Body

The body of literature that documents feminist activist efforts to eradicate gender violence in Puerto Rico does not include and interpret contemporary feminist responses to heteropatriarchal narratives, such as feminist street performances. The purpose of this study is to investigate how feminist anti-violence activism exposes interconnections between gender and ongoing processes of violence in Puerto Rico through the use of feminist street performances. Specifically, I look into street performances denouncing gender-based violence and the oppression of historically marginalized communities in Puerto Rico during 2009: Musas Desprovistas y Sin Sostén, Ponte En Mi Falda, and Silueta de Mujer. These performances were also responding to decisions made by the governmental administration of the time and the discriminatory impact these decisions had on historically marginalized communities. The historical and social context of these feminist street performances in Puerto Rico include: (a) a riot at the Oficina de la Procuradora de las Mujeres in 2002 and (b) two “anti-violence” campaigns promoting traditional gender and family roles by former governor Luis Fortuño from 2009 to 2013. Public records are used as a source for providing the social and historical context to complement the collection of 14 oral histories of respondents that participated in these street performances. Drawing from Chicana border studies and Indigenous Pacific Island studies, this dissertation advances an island feminist perspective of two concepts: the ideal(ized) national body and alternative imaginaries. The ideal(ized) national body works as a gender paradigm intentionally inscribed on and experienced by female bodies—a body socially constructed and categorized as “female,” linked to cultural gender paradigms of womanhood and other qualities attributed to females. The alternative imaginaries generated by feminist grassroots practices, such as feminist street performances, shift heteropatriarchal narratives of the female body into alternative understandings of women’s multiple identities and experiences. By documenting feminist street performances I aim to provoke further discussions about island feminism inside and outside Puerto Rico. This study advances an interdisciplinary conversation between feminist, border, performance, body, Puerto Rican, and island studies.

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