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INTRODUCTION

The Young Lords and the Rhetoric of Decoloniality

I am where I do and think. . . . What that means is not that you “think where you are,” which is common sense, but that you constitute yourself (“I am”) in the place you think. And that place is not, in my argument, a room or office at the library, but the “place” that has been configured by the colonial matrix of power.

—WALTER D. MIGNOLO, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*

Don’t push me too far. Don’t force me to tell you what you ought to know, sir. If YOU do not reclaim the man who is before you, how can I assume that you reclaim the man that is in you? If YOU do not want the man who is before you, how can I believe the man that is perhaps in you? If YOU do not demand the man, if YOU do not sacrifice the man that is in you so that the man who is on this earth shall be more than a body . . . by what conjurer’s trick will I have to acquire the certainty that you, too, are worthy of my love?

—FRANTZ FANON, “The ‘North African Syndrome’”

In the summer of 1969, a group of young Puerto Ricans in New York City, angered and fed up with what they perceived as oppressive approaches to the health, educational, and political needs of the Puerto Rican community, took matters into their own hands. The group, calling themselves the Young Lords, was a multiethnic, though primarily Nuyorican, liberation organization that formed in El Barrio (a.k.a. East Harlem or Spanish Harlem) in July of that year.¹ The Young Lords’ activism was enacted in conjunction with symbolic resources that articulated revolution as essential to “the people” and vice versa. This revolutionary tradition was first set in motion in the sixteenth century, after the conquest led by Christopher Columbus, and peaked in moments like the 1868 independence revolt known as El Grito de Lares (The Cry of Lares) in Puerto Rico and through Puerto Rican Nationalist Party armed activism on the island and in the mainland United States in the 1950s. Meg Starr observes that, influenced by Latin American revolutionaries, U.S. American revolutionaries, the Black Power struggle, and others, “the Young Lords centered their work on a combination of community-based empowerment and national liberation.”² The Young Lords simultaneously operated through coalitional politics

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with other self-described Third World radical organizations (the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, the Young Patriots, I Wor Kuen, etc.) and advanced a “revolutionary nationalist” agenda, which sought to address the material, political, and psychological needs of the community. In so doing, they struggled to discern the most appropriate tactical maneuvers for negotiating systemic constraints and overcoming the stacked deck out of which their hand had been dealt.

After initiating the process of articulating a space for revolutionary activism in El Barrio through their garbage offensive—a protest organized around increased trash pickups, which realized a short-lived victory at the conclusion of the summer of 1969—the Young Lords turned their attention to expanding activities in the community and concretizing what they envisioned in their “13 Point Program and Platform” by terms such as “community control,” “self-determination,” and “liberation.” Faced with a long history of outsiders controlling nearly all aspects of community members’ daily lives, the Young Lords instituted practical programs to challenge the exercise of power by the state and outsider-run institutions—an exercise of power that had profound effects on both their material and mental conditions. Such programs generated community service and activism surrounding health care, food, clothing, education, and more.

One of the first points of programmatic expansion revolved around the issue of health (see Figure I.1). Lead poisoning was reaching near epidemic proportions in New York City, and the Young Lords resolved to take a leadership role in addressing the problem. Reporting in the *Village Voice* in late 1969, Jack Newfield noted that “Medical authorities estimate there are 30,000 undiagnosed cases of lead poisoning each year in the city. The victims are usually children between the ages of one and three, who eat flaking or peeling paint from tenement walls.”³ In response to this health disaster and the city’s unwillingness or inability to address it, the Young Lords struck a deal with the Health Department to administer detection tests. Using the same kind of Saul Alinsky-style grassroots community organizing they had employed in the peaceful phase of the garbage offensive (when the Young Lords organized community members to clean East Harlem), the activists leafleted El Barrio with flyers that read: “We are operating our own lead poisoning detection program with students from New York Medical College. . . . The Young Lords and medical personnel will knock on your door Tuesday and ask to test your children for lead poison. Do not turn them away. Help save your children.”⁴ Having learned lessons from their interaction with the Sanitation Department during the garbage offensive, the Young Lords later staged a sit-in to acquire the tests the Health Department had originally offered; thus, the organization sparked community awareness of both the health problems associated with lead paint and the community’s ambivalent reliance on the city’s social services.

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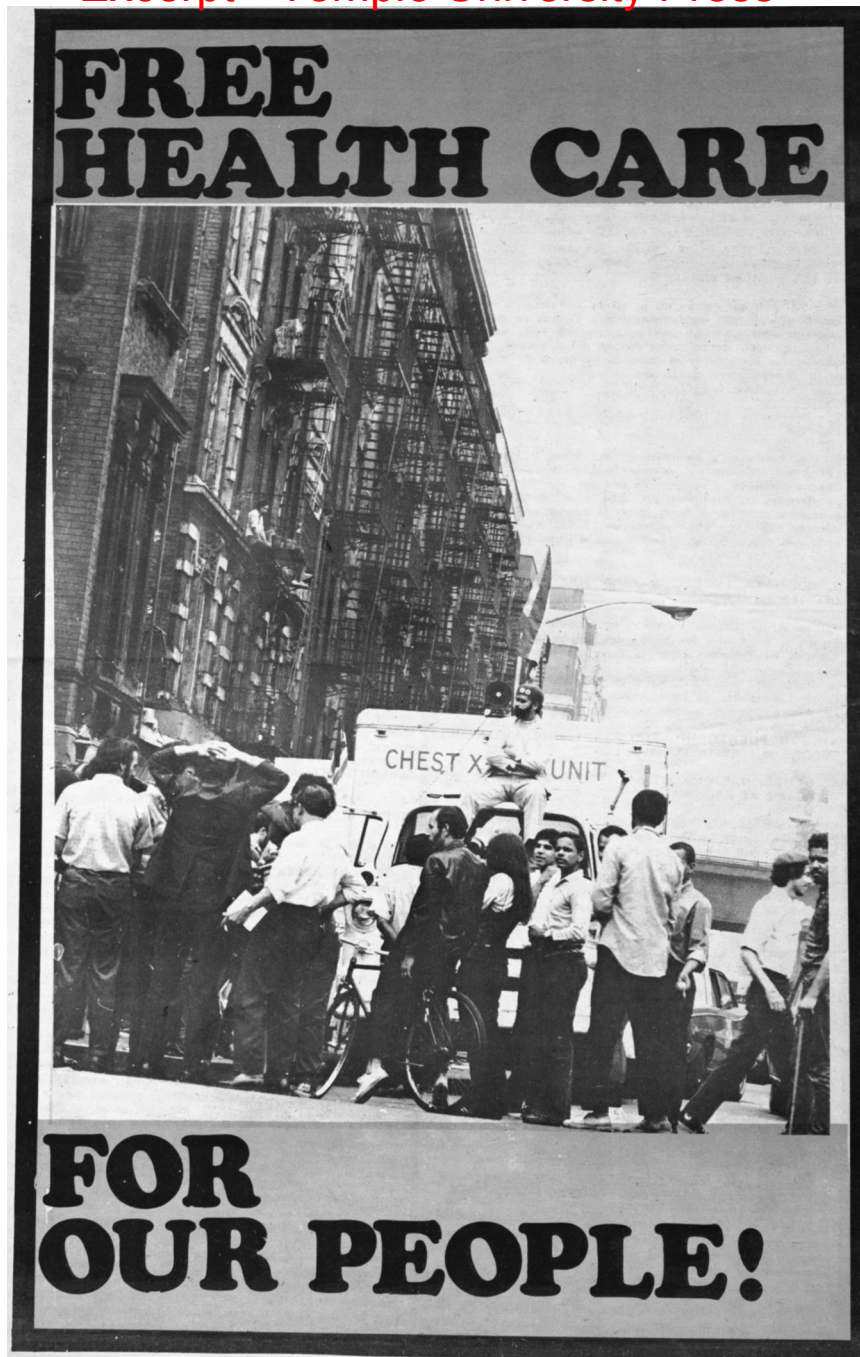


Figure I.1 Back cover of *Palante* 2, no. 6 (July 3, 1970).

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Although an important program in its own right,⁵ lead poisoning testing was symbolic of one of the most important points in the Young Lords' platform, which read:

WE WANT COMMUNITY CONTROL OF OUR INSTITUTIONS AND LAND
We want control of our communities by our people and programs to guarantee that all institutions serve the needs of our people. People's control of police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation and welfare are needed. We want an end to attacks on our land by urban renewal, highway destruction, universities and corporations. LAND BELONGS TO ALL THE PEOPLE!⁶

As a gesture toward community control of health care, the lead poisoning testing program was among the earliest of many subsequent attempts to assert the peoples' liberation and reduce reliance on an oppressive, ultimately racist, classist, and colonialist system.

Such a demand for community control, however, was not made out of whole cloth. Quite the contrary, the history of Puerto Ricans in the United States and on the island is marked by colonial state control of land and institutions to the detriment of the people. Once a self-sustainable country, conditions changed in the late fifteenth century when Spain colonized Borikén and renamed the island nation for its rich ports, thus "Puerto Rico." As its economy began to shift to accommodate greater export production of goods, domestic agricultural production declined. Spanish control and influence grew over the years, and Puerto Rico became more reliant on others for basic necessities like food.⁷ When the United States took control of Puerto Rico in 1898, this trend toward an export economy accelerated, and its impact was amplified by colonial policies that made the cost of basic foods 8–14 percent higher than in New York City (in spite of the fact that wages in Puerto Rico averaged less than \$1 a day compared with \$4–\$10 a day in New York).⁸ With greater reliance on U.S. food imports came further intrusion in areas like education, which was designed to inculcate the locals in "American values"⁹ and extend colonization into the mind.¹⁰

The inability of Puerto Ricans to take control of their economy, education, and other local institutions on the island because of U.S. colonial policies continued in new urban centers once they migrated. In New York City, the primary migration target from the 1920s through the 1970s, Puerto Ricans were often only marginally better off than they were on the island. While wages were higher and food was cheaper, Puerto Ricans in New York still fared worse than any other racial or ethnic group.¹¹ President Johnson's "Great Society" social programs were eventually enacted with the intent of alleviating some of the financial pressures felt by African Americans, Latin@s,¹² and others; but for

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Puerto Ricans (and many others), the programs were horribly inefficient and failed to elevate them out of an embedded position in the underclass. Tenements were run by landlords with questionable ethics (read: slumlords); social service organizations were ruled by “poverty pimps”;¹³ hospitals in poor neighborhoods were understaffed, underfunded, and, in the case of Lincoln Hospital, operated despite having been condemned by the city.¹⁴ Politically, the community was disparaged as “docile,” and professionals, so-called experts, and elites monopolized the role of political activism.¹⁵ By most accounts, life for the working class Puerto Rican in El Barrio left much to be desired. Community members basically had two choices: move out or put up with it; and given deep structures of poverty and a colonized mentality, this was a false choice.¹⁶

During their brief tenure (1969–1976), the New York Young Lords were a revolutionary nationalist, antiracist, antisexist group who advanced a complex political program featuring support for the liberation of all Puerto Ricans (on the island and in the United States), the broader liberation of all Third World people, equality for women, U.S. demilitarization, leftist political education, redistributive justice, and other programs as these fit into their ecumenical ideology. Their activism took many forms. They gave speeches, held rallies, taught political education courses out of their community offices, and produced a newspaper and radio program (both called *Palante*) that articulated their vision of democratic egalitarianism, anticolonialism, and socialist redistribution. They started numerous community initiatives such as the lead poisoning and tuberculosis testing programs, childcare for working mothers, and meal programs for poor children. They also engaged in acts of civil disobedience such as the garbage offensive, two separate takeovers of an East Harlem church (which they renamed the “People’s Church” each time), sit-ins and disruptions at a local hospital that the city had condemned, and support of acts of civil unrest sponsored by other groups (e.g., Black Panther Party and student groups). In all, they engaged in what they believed were strategically and tactically sound actions to advance their cause and transform their people. Operating in a colonial borderland that was mapped onto their spaces, bodies, and minds, the Young Lords advanced decolonial sensibilities in El Barrio and beyond.

Despite being the first post-McCarthy era radical Nuyorican organization¹⁷ and having a street named after them in El Barrio in the summer of 2014, the discourse and activism of the Young Lords remains drastically understudied to this day. Unfortunately, such historical omissions are not unusual where Puerto Ricans are concerned. Writing broadly about scholarly inattention to Puerto Rican movements of that era, Andrés Torres laments that “the historical record on this experience is almost nonexistent. Even within the ‘social movements’ and ‘diversity’ literature, we find barely a mention of the Puerto

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Rican contribution to the insurgency that changed the United States.”¹⁸ In their edited volume titled *The Puerto Rican Movement*, Torres and José E. Velázquez start filling the intellectual gaps and addressing the ways in which mainland Puerto Ricans began generating consciousness and organizational structures to mount resistance against lived oppression that had long-standing historical, political, socioeconomic, and cultural roots. The “‘*Nuevo Despertar*’ [New Awareness] of Puerto Rican radicalism”¹⁹ that took place across U.S. communities in the 1960s had roots in a complex mixture of (a) contemporary black, Chicano, Asian, and other Third World and student activist influences; (b) a renewed sense of a history of struggle against the colonial domination of Puerto Ricans; and (c) an emergent vocabulary to engage critically the intersections of race, class, gender, and nation. Central to this *Nuevo Despertar* in New York City was the Young Lords. Notwithstanding their centrality, no scholarly monograph to date has focused sustained attention on what Marta Moreno calls “this group of young men and women of color who made [a] significant impact on history.”²⁰ At one level, then, *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation* makes such a contribution.

Through careful archival research and theoretically informed critical perspectives in the pages that follow, I contextualize and craft an account of the Young Lords that rescues them from historical obscurity and recovers stories of resistance that remain useful and significant today, especially for Puerto Ricans and other Latin@s who continue to be politically disenfranchised and systematically marginalized. As Emma Pérez reminds us, though, “There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories—many stories.”²¹ With Pérez’s exhortation in mind, this book is an exercise in *historia*: one engaging the past through interpretation but also productive of a particular story of that past and its meanings.²² This story—a meaningful/meaning-full account of change over time—is one that is, necessarily, indivisible from my encounter with an archive of materials and a repertoire of embodied and lived memories that emerge from former Young Lords and their places of activism.²³ Indeed, it is a story inseparable from my own personal transformation through which I came to see myself as located within the Global South.²⁴ As such, my goal is to offer one partial, perspectival, and contingent critical-interpretive engagement of the Young Lords that grapples with the geographic and body-political situatedness of their discourse and activism as well as my own position as a diasporic Puerto Rican academic who is thinking and writing from within the Global South, rather than dominant Euro/American-centric modalities.

Beyond the historical point, then, this book engages the Young Lords as a critical touchstone that can enrich and inform contemporary discussions about Latin@s specifically and decolonial politics more broadly. Approaching the Young Lords from theoretical and critical perspectives informed by Latin@ studies, rhetorical and communication theory, American studies, and

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history, my goal is to augment contemporary scholarly discussions of coloniality, nationalism, and vernacular discourse by mobilizing the Young Lords' discourse and activism. While Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that "the social movements of the late 60s and early 70s . . . provide[d] the intellectual and political project of decolonization with more substance and theoretical precision,"²⁵ he and his peers writing on coloniality often focus less on those movements themselves and more on the theoretical perspectives that emerged from and were enabled by those movements at later dates (generally beginning in the 1980s and 1990s). By turning attention directly to these movements, in my case the New York Young Lords, I believe we can cultivate a better sense of how these ideas can work on the ground and enrich our understandings of what things such as decoloniality, epistemic disobedience, and delinking might actually look like. Furthermore, by focusing on those discourses in their contexts, we can avoid overgeneralizing and making universal claims of our own about how modernity/coloniality functions in the world. In this book, I make the case that the New York Young Lords' enactment of differential consciousness pushes the boundaries of decolonial theory.²⁶ Through critical performances of border thinking, epistemic disobedience, and delinking, the Young Lords crafted a decolonial praxis that resisted ideological oversimplification and generated new possibilities and spaces for activism in their immediate contexts and beyond. Engaging such complexity in the Young Lords' decolonial praxis, however, requires critical/theoretical perspectives that can be attentive to the uniqueness of their epistemic and ontological challenges, which is a point I return to in a moment.

All of that said, I should be clear about two related limitations of this book. First, I am not attempting to write the complete and definitive history of the New York Young Lords. Although the organization existed for only a short period of time, the scope of their activism was too expansive to be covered with sufficient depth in a critical-interpretive project such as this. Much of the work I am doing *is* historical, however, and I will address the Young Lords' scope in Chapter 1 and elsewhere; but my attention is focused most on key components of their complex, ecumenical, sometimes contradictory ideology and early instances of their activism—especially in their first phase as the Young Lords Organization. Left out, also, is an extended engagement of the Chicago-based Young Lords Organization. While the New York group got its start as a chapter that answered to the Chicago leadership, the Chicago chapter had their own political and rhetorical style that warrants somewhat separate attention.²⁷ It is my deepest hope that someone else takes up that charge with a study on the original Chicago chapter. Second, while I am interested greatly in advancing theoretical perspectives as they relate to the techniques for delinking from modernity/coloniality, I do not intend this book to be a philosophical project on decoloniality. I seek, instead, to enrich our understandings of *how* activists perform epistemic disobedience and enact delinking though

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a critical engagement of the Young Lords' grassroots rhetoric and political action. In this way, my hope is that this book acts as a conversation and a bridge between historians, rhetoricians, and decolonial theorists alike—a bridge that moves us into a space where we can appreciate better the connections between theory and practice and envision the lived potentials of decoloniality. Learning from the example of the Young Lords and from decolonial scholarship, and doing my best to escape what Chela Sandoval calls the “apartheid of theoretical domains,”²⁸ I aim to enact some decolonial sensibilities of my own over the course of the chapters that follow.

On Coming to the Young Lords

My journey to the Young Lords and this project began in graduate school, long after I thought I knew who I was as a scholar and had finally settled into the epistemic zeitgeist of critical communication studies. Sometime late in my master's degree coursework I had become enamored with radical democratic theory and psychoanalysis and convinced my mentors and myself that a dissertation on election ballots as the “sublime object” of democracy would be a good idea. But as I went through my coursework, my department made some new hires that helped shift my perspectives and began leading me down another path. First, we hired Yeidy Rivero, an amazing media scholar and the first Puerto Rican professor I had ever met. Although I never had the chance to take a course with her, she and I began informally discussing Puerto Rican history, politics, culture, and so on; and she provided me with some reading list suggestions to start me on the path of ascertaining a bit more about my own ethno-racial background. Discovering more about Puerto Rico's colonial history led me to also talk with another professor in my department, Roopali Mukherjee, about postcolonial theory and the politics of race/racialization. These conversations with Rivero and Mukherjee remained in the background—side work that I investigated half-heartedly for my own personal edification rather than scholarly pursuits. Second, we hired Phaedra Pezzullo, an abundantly smart and savvy feminist and environmental rhetorician, who offered her first graduate course on “feminist rhetoric” during what was supposed to be my last semester of coursework in the spring term of 2003.

Pezzullo's class became a key moment in my personal and intellectual development. About a third of the way through the semester, we met to discuss final project ideas. We had been reading some feminist scholarship on autoethnography and performative writing,²⁹ and knowing that I wanted to tackle the ideas I first broached with Rivero, Pezzullo offered the idea of letting me do a kind of autoethnographic piece related to my Puerto Rican heritage. Never before had a teacher or professor ever encouraged me to research something so intimately tied to who I was. Knowing virtually nothing and unsure where to begin, I started by turning to Roberto Santiago's edited col-

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lection *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings—An Anthology*.³⁰ Eagerly opening the pages of the book, I experienced multiple revelations. First, reading Sandra María Esteves's "Here," I got poetry for the first time . . . and I wept. Her words spoke (and continue to speak) to me on a level that I struggle to verbalize. Second, I ran across a small piece by Felipe Luciano, excerpted from the Young Lords' book *Palante: Young Lords Party*, and was entranced. Identifying with his experiences surrounding a lack of access to language (i.e., not being fluent in Spanish), culture, history, and more, I became excited and hurriedly began researching the New York Young Lords as best as I could from Bloomington, Indiana. The experience was transformative both on an intellectual level and on a personal one, as I *became* Boricua (Rivero would affectionately refer to me as a "born-again Boricua") through my research and writing. While I was born a Puerto Rican in Washington State, it took three professors (all of whom are women, two of whom are women of color) to jump-start the process of getting me to think *from* a position rooted in Puerto Ricanness and *latinidad*.

I turn to this fragment of my own origin story, the kind of thing usually relegated to a book's preface, because I think it is central to how I approach the Young Lords and to the place from which I write as a scholar committed to decoloniality. Without these encounters and subsequent enduring relationships formed with other Latin@s in communication studies and Latin@ studies, I would probably continue to locate myself firmly within the epistemic terrain of "the West." One of the hallmarks of decolonial thinking is a challenge to what Walter D. Mignolo calls "zero point epistemology," under which the "geopolitical and bio-graphic politics . . . of knowledge" gets occluded or hidden in a "grounding without grounding" that is best (but not exclusively) captured by Descartes's famous dictum "I think, therefore I am."³¹ Mignolo's reversal, detailed in the first epigraph of this chapter and in U.S. Third World feminist writings that also influence my work, recovers the centrality of *location* and *embodiment* to knowledge production and "sets the stage for epistemic affirmations that have been disavowed."³² Such affirmations were central to the New York Young Lords' own challenges to the coloniality of knowledge and being—challenges seen within and beyond that excerpt from Luciano that I read more than a decade ago—which have pushed me to rethink again and again *how* best to engage critically this group of young Latin@s who escape oversimplified categorization.

In addition to extending my coursework to complement a research project on the Young Lords, I immersed myself in primary materials—embarking on my own process of recovery and discovery tied intimately to the research archive. I began by acquiring copies of the Young Lords' writings that were available through interlibrary loan: their book, *Palante: Young Lords Party*; issues of their *Palante* newspaper available on microfilm; mass media news coverage of the group; published *testimonios* of leaders; and documentary

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films. There was little scholarship on the Young Lords at the time, but I gathered the handful of book chapters and journal articles that were available. Quickly, I realized the need to travel to New York City to conduct research and made arrangements to spend some time in the archives and collections of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Surrounding that trip, I tracked down former Young Lords (leaders and cadre) whom I could interview. As word spread that I was not yet another person looking to merely capitalize off the legacy of the Young Lords, more doors were opened.³³ Over the course of about three years, from 2004 to 2006, I conducted about two dozen oral histories of former members and allies. Across multiple visits, I collected materials from additional archives—New York University's Tamiment Library, the New York Public Library, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, private collections—including images, ephemera (e.g., flyers and buttons), and recordings of their radio program and other radio and television appearances. Some of this textual and imagistic material made it into an earlier collection of primary sources titled *The Young Lords: A Reader*. Other materials, however, have sat in my archive only to be reencountered as I was preparing the manuscript for this book.

My experience assembling an archive of materials was anything but disinterested. Former Young Lords opened their homes, hearts, and mouths in a manner that often transcended the researcher-subject divide. I have felt welcomed, not just as a guest but as kin, into many people's lives. I do not know whether they shared the same feelings of kinship; I suspect that some did and others did not. But the affective dimension of the research project was (and still is) significant to me—and a big part of the reason why I sought to publish the edited collection of primary texts first. Despite such feelings of kinship and love, time I spent in El Barrio doing fieldwork for research and to simply hang out with friends taught me that I *am* an outsider, that I am not *of* El Barrio. Once, while photographing murals and gardens for a tangential research project, I was even accused by a passerby of being a "pig"—an epithet shouted to sonically mark the neighborhood space as unsafe due to my very presence. Yet on other occasions, I have been harassed by police for merely standing on a corner and chatting with friends. Such tensions between belonging and unbelonging haunt my thoughts and sometimes engulf my body with teeming emotions. Such tensions also underscore the importance of *thinking from* the literal and figural locations from which the Young Lords discourse emerged. This book is an attempt to do justice to their living memory.

On Coloniality with a Rhetorical Inflection

I can barely begin to imagine the countless number of ways the story of the Young Lords could be encountered and told.³⁴ I suspect that historians, sociologists, anthropologists, comparative literature scholars, American studies

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scholars, Latin@ studies scholars, critical race theorists, communication critics, and human geographers, among others (and the myriad different subperspectives within each of those), would all have unique and interesting things to say about the Young Lords. Although I am guided by many questions related to history, sociology, communication, and social theory, I remain most interested in a set of questions about the ways in which the Young Lords engaged their lived experiences of coloniality: How did the Young Lords craft a history of colonialism on the island? Relatedly, how did they craft a history of resistance to colonialism on the island and throughout the Global South? How did they develop a critical, theoretical perspective of “internal colonialism” and turn attention to both the psychic and otherwise material dimensions of colonialism within the geographical boundaries of the continental United States generally and diasporic Puerto Rican communities specifically? In what ways did they explore the linkages between racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism within a context defined by coloniality? How did they generate practices designed to resist coloniality as they experienced it in New York? What are some of the formal qualities of the Young Lords’ decolonial sensibilities? Alternatively, how can we learn from the *kinds of things they did* in order to challenge decoloniality outside of the Young Lords’ specific social/cultural/economic conjuncture? Addressing these questions requires a background in the theoretical perspective I identify as coloniality/decoloniality (or, for brevity’s sake, *de/coloniality*).

Coloniality, according to Maldonado-Torres, “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.”³⁵ At one level, scholars of coloniality are interested in those contexts for which colonialism is a defining feature even (perhaps especially) when *de jure* colonialism is absent. Theories of coloniality, in this sense, share a commonality with postcolonial theory as both often turn attention to formerly colonial contexts. For purposes of conceptual distinction, however, the similarities stop there. Where postcolonial theory has roots largely in British and French colonial contexts, coloniality and decoloniality hail from Latin American, U.S. Latin@, and American indigenous history, politics, culture, and theory, which makes them particularly well suited for studies in the U.S. context. Furthermore, the scholars I cite throughout this book have a mixed relationship to postcolonial theory—arguing off and on that it is undergirded by a modernist rationality, tied too strongly to postmodernism and, ironically, Eurocentrism.³⁶ Decolonial theorists distinguish themselves, then, in two ways. First, decoloniality is framed as an attempt to delink from modernity/coloniality in theory and practice, embarking in what Mignolo calls forms of “epistemic disobedience” that are attentive to geographic and body-political modes of theorizing and acting in the world. Second, while certainly interested in contexts marked by an explicit history of

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direct colonialism, decolonial theorists broaden the focus to all of modernity, which makes the perspective an alternative to modernism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, in addition to postcolonialism. While postcolonial and decolonial scholars will oftentimes end up on the same side of any given issue, each is guided by a different critical vocabulary and conceptual genealogy.

Indeed, this issue of genealogy is an important one for understanding this book and where I see my arguments fitting into the larger literature on de/coloniality. As Mignolo argues, “Decolonial thinking needs to build its own genealogy of thought; otherwise it would fall prey to genealogies of thought already established and would, in the process, disregard and devalue all other possibilities. Decolonization of knowledge and of being requires one to engage in rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn’t yet exist.”³⁷ Mignolo’s call, here, is quite programmatic and future oriented—demanding that we begin considering modes of knowing and being, and sources for that knowledge, that do not fit neatly into the rhetorics of modernity and, I would add, the academy. Doing so helps to ensure that we do not merely reproduce dominant ways of thinking and acting in the world; his is a call, in other words, to think and act *otherwise*, to chart an epistemic terrain *from* and *of* the Global South. One might reasonably inquire, here, that even when one writes against the grain of an epistemology, or writes to avoid an epistemology, is that epistemology not still *there* in some odd way? Perhaps; but the question is more appropriately one of epistemic *privilege* rather than mere *existence*.

In the context of this book on the Young Lords, I think the questions of genealogy and theoretical influences are uniquely significant. Although I could read the Young Lords from perspectives guided principally by Foucault, Deleuze, Marx, Lacan, Laclau, Mouffe, some other poststructuralist, or whoever the hottest European theorist happens to be at the moment, why should I? There are political stakes in crafting an alternative genealogy that can help us understand our world in ways that deny the epistemic privilege of those dominant theoretical perspectives, even if those perspectives make guest appearances from time to time throughout the book. Furthermore, there is no easy way to say “*this* is when it is okay to reappropriate and cite from the West, and *that* is when it is not okay to do so”; such distinctions would replicate an arhetorical and acontextual logic that would weaken the decolonial perspective I advance. As a question of orientation, however, I think it is possible and desirable to be guided chiefly by decoloniality and perspectives that emerge from the Global South. In the context of this book, I think there is a case to be made that perspectives emergent from and speaking principally to the West are ill suited to an engagement of a group like the Young Lords, whose locus of enunciation was not within the West. Rather, even while addressing audiences inside the metropole, the Young Lords spoke *from* and *to* the Global South by crafting their epistemic location, social space, and inventive discourses as “Third World” in origin, intent, and direction. I am particularly persuaded by

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Mignolo's assessment that "modernity has its own critics . . . but in the Third World the problems are not the same as in the First, and therefore to transplant both the problems and methods from the First to the Third World is no less a colonial operation than transplanting armies or factories to satisfy the needs of the First World."³⁸ To guard against reproducing colonial violence in scholarship, Bernadette Marie Calafell echoes, "we must meet [marginalized discourses] on their own terms methodologically."³⁹

Critical-interpretive scholarship is always "both served and confined by theory and method."⁴⁰ Calafell's demand to take up rhetorics on their own terms and the complementary need to craft genealogies of thought from the margins of modernity/coloniality compel me to actively ignore a host of theoretical perspectives and methodologies. By turning to decoloniality, I am making a political and methodological choice to prioritize the Global South, to heed the calls of the dispossessed and work from within this particular epistemic location. My adherence to these theoretical and practical commitments underscores my general belief that this is the best way to approach the Young Lords' discourse and activism. Taking some other approach (e.g., radical democratic theory or identity performativity) and grafting it onto the Young Lords would be historically disingenuous, risk an unreflexive presentism, and do a kind of epistemic violence to their words and deeds by forcing them into modern/colonial forms of legibility.

In the chapters that follow, I turn my attention to specific examples of the Young Lords' discourse and activism to craft a richer story of what they accomplished, elucidate some specific ways in which decolonial delinking can function "on the ground," and model a scholarly praxis that takes discourses up on their own terms. For example, in Chapter 1, I offer an overview of the historical conditions enabling and informing the emergence of the New York Young Lords in July 1969. Tracing those conditions of emergence, as the Young Lords did, to Puerto Rico's colonization in the late fifteenth century, my story is guided by those things that seemed most important and significant to the Young Lords: direct colonial rule by Spain and the United States, indigenous Taíno culture and political resistance, nineteenth-century liberation movements (including slave revolts), and the development of Nationalist Party politics and the independence movement in the twentieth century. In crafting that story, I am guided partly by the Young Lords' own engagement of this history in their biweekly newspaper *Palante*; therefore, I explore some of the ways the Young Lords crafted a useable history highlighting colonization, nationhood, resistance, racism, and sexism. I also direct attention to the immediate context of 1960s radicalism in the United States (especially black freedom struggles) and decolonization struggles worldwide, both of which functioned as important enabling conditions for the Young Lords' emergence. Built from that historical backdrop, I offer an extended engagement of the Young Lords' origins and organizational transformations—from the Young

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Lords Organization (1969), to the Young Lords Party (1970), to the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (1972)—to help situate the critical engagements in subsequent chapters. Just as the Young Lords imagined and produced ways to challenge coloniality within their contexts, so too should a scholarly engagement of their history and memory adopt a position committed to decoloniality.

That said, such a decolonial turn does not require a wholesale rejection of everything that happens to come from the West. Rather, Maldonado-Torres suggests, decoloniality “highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity. It seeks to open up the sources for thinking and to break up the apartheid of theoretical domains through renewed forms of critique and epistemic creolization.”⁴¹ Creolization operates outside of an either/or logic that would require some kind of Third World fundamentalism. It is a kind of border thinking that initiates a *preference* for those voices that have been historically and politically silenced or marginalized but does not seek a complete supplication. Mignolo concurs, describing this decolonial move as “a double movement: unveiling the regional foundations of universal claims to truth as well as the categories of thought and the logic that sustains all branches of Western knowledge.”⁴² In other words, *decoloniality seeks to challenge the privilege and universalism of various forms of knowledge*. Such a normative stance requires that we better situate knowledge in its geographic and embodied specificity and *resist attempts to universalize any particular episteme*. It does not require, however, that we reject “European modernity,” just that we reject the West’s claim to epistemic privilege.⁴³ That is, indeed, a fine line to walk.

In my reading of contemporary decolonial scholarship, people seem to risk slipping into one of a couple of related problems in negotiating such a fine line. On the one hand, you have scholars like Maldonado-Torres and Enrique Dussel who resist an overreaction to coloniality in theory by drawing from and recovering ideas located within Western philosophy in order to support rethinking our epistemological commitments and decentering the West.⁴⁴ In doing so, however, these scholars direct less attention to actual, geographically located and embodied grassroots discourses and actions. They philosophically justify doing so (which is their goal, after all) but provide readers with a limited sense for what decoloniality looks like in geographically specific and sociohistorically contingent contexts. On the other hand, you have scholars like Mignolo who disengage from Western philosophical discourses nearly altogether but in the process risk propagating a kind of determinism of perspective.⁴⁵ While I do not think this is his intention, Mignolo can come across to some readers as offering a totalizing discourse that minimizes room for resistance. While concepts like “border thinking” seem designed to remedy this, there are ways in which Mignolo’s position is so damning of modernity/coloniality—for instance, his critique of “the logic that sustains all branches of Western

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knowledge” cited in the last paragraph—that there seems to be little chance for those inside that system to challenge it.⁴⁶ When he does turn to examples (e.g., the Zapatistas in Mexico or the emergence of a concept of “the communal” in South America), they seem exemplary of a wholesale rejection of modernity/coloniality: a *stepping outside* that, despite the way Mignolo explicitly qualifies his argument, implies that (a) resistance is generally futile, (b) the only practical solution is wholesale rejection, and/or (c) the scholar’s only option is demystification/debunking.

Often stuck making bigger theoretical arguments justifying their shifts in perspective, decolonial theorists can lack a level of rhetorical specificity that, ironically, makes it harder to explore the geographic and embodied discourses they see as paramount. There are some exceptions, but in general, the disconnect between theory and practice is pronounced.⁴⁷ And there is nothing wrong with that, so long as others can extend such theoretical innovation through more grounded forms of scholarship and activism. As a corrective, I submit that de/colonial scholarship can benefit from a more rhetorical orientation that is highly attentive to practices of radical contextualization, sociohistorical contingency, and the situatedness of public discourses and activism. In making a turn to rhetorical perspectives and attitudes, I am not interested in engaging in some kind of parochial elucidation of rhetoric from within the disciplinary terrain of U.S. communication studies. Such an exercise is neither necessary to understand the arguments in this book, nor would it be particularly fruitful given the differences of perspectives on rhetoric within the discipline as a whole. That said, I think it is important to set out a basic understanding of what I mean by “rhetoric” throughout the chapters that follow and how that understanding undergirds the core methodological orientation of this project. Rhetoric is not reducible to empty verbiage, deceitful speech, or a form of inaction.⁴⁸ Instead, I see rhetoric as both an object of inquiry and a perspective for engaging that object. Rhetoric as a discipline is, itself, highly problematic in the ways in which it perpetuates modern/colonial commitments; it is, for example, tied strongly to a master narrative fully imbricated with the story of “Western civilization.”⁴⁹ In other forums, I have started to challenge some of those biases;⁵⁰ but for the purposes of my argument here, I think some core commitments can be productive. At the most basic level, I feel comfortable defining rhetoric as (the study of) situated public discourse. Each term in that brief definition is open to contestation and elaboration, and I want to explore a little more fully my own orienting proclivities about each and how they relate to de/coloniality.