Name: Carla Lugo

Title: The Role of Colonialism in Puerto Rico and Barbuda's Post-Hurricane Recovery

Abstract: In September of 2017, the Caribbean experienced its most active hurricane season in its recorded history with a total of 17 storms of which 10 were hurricanes. The widespread destruction that the hurricanes caused would have the effect of considering these phenomena "natural disasters", however, as this thesis reveals, disasters are always products of our social, political, and economic systems. The Caribbean is made up of 23 populated bodies of land of which 19 are currently territories or possessions of the United States or European States. Taking current colonial entanglements and the long history of colonization in the Caribbean into account, this thesis sets out to uncover the role of colonialism and coloniality in disaster recovery in the Caribbean. Through the case studies of colonial history in Barbuda and Puerto Rico and their experiences before and after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, respectively, I trace the presence of colonialism's legacy in disaster recovery plans and discourse. My thesis underlines three broad findings. First, disasters create "windows of opportunity" for global elites at the expense of local populations that have experienced the hurricanes. While the local populations are facing distress and trauma from the hurricanes, and ensuring their survival, governments, foreign elites, and "policy entrepreneurs" take advantage of the distraction that hurricanes create to pass policies or development plans that would have otherwise faced resistance. The marketing of the Caribbean as paradise, makes these islands especially vulnerable to predatory tourism development plans. Second, understanding that colonialism is not just a physical control of land or financial dependency, but also a control of the minds and the heart, this thesis uncovers how the narratives of Barbudans and Puerto Ricans as lazy people or people that are not capable of informing their own recoveries is a legacy of colonialism. Lastly, this thesis problematizes disaster discourse and the emphasis on "social vulnerability" as a contributor to the creation of disasters. Instead of framing natural hazards as a problem that requires Western intervention, science, and technology, the field needs to acknowledge the role of local communities in deciding their futures. Only then, can the discourse begin to divorce itself from colonialism's legacy.